

BEYOND SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MORAL INJURY:
A NEW BIRTH OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH THROUGH
MINISTERING TO EX-OFFENDERS

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ABSTRACT

This work is a systemic and analytical study on how the urban church nurtures, cultivates and ministers to others through a Living System Ministry. This work will emphasize how the urban church can better minister to the ex-offenders in the church. It explores the church's diverse theological approach and an awareness of some of the needs of many worshipers. This project is designed to show a greater inclusiveness among ministry leaders and worshipers within a tailored ministry. It is designed to help others grow biblically, spiritually and personally.

This thesis-project will focus on taking a closer look into the life of the ex-offender and developing a ministry that can support and assist them in some of their needs while ministering to them. The church, Biblical teachings and Living Systems Ministry will serve as the primary approach in developing this ministry. The Living Systems Hexagoning Process will serve as a model and as a needs-assessment tool to minister to ex-offenders. The focus group approach of the Hexagoning process helped in establishing the needs of this particular ministry relating to ex-offenders. This approach will seek to reduce the recidivism rate through ministry.

Dr. Eldin Villafañe's "Hermeneutical Circle of Christian Ethics" and the process of implementation of a Living System Ministry approach to ministering to ex-offenders in the church, provide the foundational framework for this thesis. By the power of God and through some of Dr. Villafañe's teachings on shalom and "seeking the peace in the city," I hope and pray that peace and shalom will pour into the souls of these individuals who are receiving ministry.

INTRODUCTION

A NEW DAY OF HOPE AND LIVING OUR LIVES THROUGH CHRIST

God's great gift to mankind is the creation of the universe, living systems and love for all to share. Beyond God's blessing of His Creation, every day is a new day of hope for the anticipated future of our lives. No one knows what tomorrow will bring so we must strive one day at a time and pray that the next day is better than the last. From God's creation to the ministry of Jesus, including the lives that we live today and into the future of mankind, we will always be exposed to a living system and the more complex realm of living systems. Everything that we are exposed to in life is connected to some type of living system. Living systems become conjoined to one another like branches on a tree. Every aspect of the branch is in support of sustaining the growth of the tree.

Living systems impact every aspect of our personal, professional, scholarly, spiritual and ministry lives. As part of our daily living continues from day to day we find ourselves undertaking a diverse range of experiences -- some which are good, bad and complex. As you look at living systems as a resource, you will begin to understand that living systems provide direction, shapes individual characteristics and allow growth.

The living systems that surround our lives are in many ways interconnected. The physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual systems are somehow interrelated, because one aspect of this living system is dependent upon one another for functional ability. During this brief exploration of living systems, you will begin to view a few living systems and their relationship to the Bible.

During this journey in our lives, cultural growth and experiences play a very critical role in our individual and collective environments. As we reside in our homes we adapt to its living system. As we venture outside the home we adapt to another living system called the social realm. Some people might not realize that from day to day they adapt to many living systems. Just think about the living systems we encounter from one category to the next for example, home, outside activities, work, school and church. Living systems are a part of our lives where there is no escape.

Within this Thesis-Project through Systems Thinking Ministry and Missions in the urban church we will take a closer look at the life and characteristics of the ex-offender and develop ways to support and minister to some of their needs. Another endeavoring ministry focus is to reduce the recidivism rate for ex-offenders through ministry.

For many years while growing up in the urban streets of Boston, MA, I have read about and observed the alarming number of African-American and Hispanic young boys and men who have been repeatedly incarcerated within the Massachusetts criminal justice system. I believe that there is something very wrong when an ex-offender has been incarcerated so many times that he or she has become desensitized to its harsh effect. Incarceration is supposed to serve as a punishment and a deterrent for a wrongful criminal act. Theoretically, upon an offender serving his or her time we are to believe that he or she is rehabilitated and then released. However, there are many repeat offenders and it does not appear to faze them in the least, because they have repeatedly been in and out of the criminal justice system. It appears that the affects of the prison

experience are conditioning people for prison lifestyle, rather than deterring them from prison.

There is overwhelming irreparable harm done to the individual, families, culture and community when many of the male citizens have been exposed to the legal system. Now that these individuals have become offenders or ex-offenders, the identification trait that they carry with them is a CORI which means, Criminal Offender Record Information. For the majority of ex-offenders a CORI results in restrictions or rejection by society, the legal system, those who administer voting rights, the Division of Motor Vehicles and the workforce. Having a CORI is equivalent to being branded. The ex-offender ministry and missions can serve as a very important window of hope for the ex-offender and his transition back into society.

At first, the thought of becoming involved in an ex-offender ministry took me by surprise, because we have been taught in our youth to disassociate ourselves from people doing wrong. The other twist to this situation is that for many years I have been on the enforcement side of things within the urban city and when this ministry was introduced to me I wondered how I would make this unfamiliar transition. After some giving some thought and suggestive encouragement from my Pastor, Rev. Dr. Conley H. Hughes, Jr., I decided to welcome the idea and this opportunity to develop the this ex-offender ministry at Concord Baptist Church of Boston in Milton, MA.

This Ex-offender Ministry will be a learning experience for myself and for the ex-offender as well. This Thesis-Project will help this ministry develop methods of ministering to ex-offenders in the urban church. In developing this treatise, there are important concepts and terms that require a definition.

INTRODUCTION TO DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are expressed in greater details throughout this work. This list of terms will introduce many of the important terms, concepts and clarification that will provide the reader with a foundational understanding while engaging in the text.

Living System: “An orderly, highly complex and highly interrelated arrangement of living systems components that works together to accomplish a high-level goal when in proper relation to each other.”¹

Living System Ministry: “Participation with God as His life flows through His living systems.”²

Living System Mission: Is to first be in full alignment with God. “One goal of living system ministry is to learn to identify and nurture the system’s own aligned plans.”³

Systems Thinking: Peter Senge’s description of “systems thinking” can be viewed as a learning puzzle of sorts. “Systems thinking” is a framework for seeing interrelationships as a whole rather than things, seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’. It is also “is a set of specific tools and techniques, originating in two threads: in ‘feedback’ concepts of cybernetics and in ‘servo-mechanism’ engineering theory dating back to the

¹ Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), xxiv.

² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, xxiv.

³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 192.

⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 192.
Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (United States:

nineteenth century.”⁴ System Thinking involves getting to the root of a system problem and then finding ways to correct and control the situation at hand.

High-level Thinking: Going beyond the perception threshold is a very critical part of living system ministry.⁵ We move past the perception threshold as the Spirit of God opens our eyes.⁶ What God does is high-level and what man does is low-level.⁷

Low-level Thinking: Falling short in the pursuit of your goal. Low-level thinking and actions generate short-term results and long-term losses in a larger environment.⁸

Complex Systems: A complex system is a relationship of cause and effect that is filled with diverse and difficult parameters.⁹

Pastoral Care: Incorporates all types of tailored or specific degrees of care: making contact, listening, checking on accuracy of issue, understanding, knowing your limitations, referrals). The mission should be Biblically based and develop a degree of growth for the person who is in need. Another goal is to facilitate spiritual wholeness.¹⁰

Discipleship: Ministering to others. This requires one who is called and chosen as a believer to follow the lifestyle of Jesus in healing, showing love and compassion for others, living, teaching and preaching the word.

⁴ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (United States: Doubleday Publishers, 2006), 68-69.

⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 173.

⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 173.

⁷ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 173.

⁸ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 318.

⁹ Jay W. Forrester, *Urban Dynamics. Chapter Six “Notes on Complex Systems”* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 108.

¹⁰ Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 74.

Moral Injury: “An injury to an individual’s moral conscience resulting from an act of perceived moral transgression.”¹¹

Social Justice: Understanding social justice, human rights, equitable treatment, cultural and gender bias that is contributing factors that alter many lives that result in harsh outcomes. “Everyone should be afforded the protection and equal access to liberties, rights, opportunities and the care for the least advantage people of society.”¹²

Incarceration: The act of placing a person in prison, jail, or a detaining facility for a specified period of time after being charged with a criminal act according to the criminal justice system.

Urban: Related to cities.

Urban Culture: The culture of towns and cities.

Urban Social Characteristics: Impoverished, poor, deteriorated environment, the “Hood,” slum, ghetto, the part of the city containing a lot of cultural and social problems.

Ex-offender: I have defined the ex-offender as: An adult individual who in the past was incarcerated in a state or federal prison and is currently released. The ex-offender is: “someone who has put criminal offences behind him and is prepared to begin a new life.”¹³

Recidivism: A repeat offender who returns to prison or jail for a new offense or a violation of parole or probation conditions.

¹¹ Brett Litz, *Moral Injury*. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_injury (accessed July 10, 2016).

¹² John Rawls, *What Is Social Justice?*, <http://gjs.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice> (accessed February 16, 2016).

¹³ Louis N. Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders* (Washington, DC: Conquest Books, 2000), 2.

Faith: Believing. “Faith is the substance of things are hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” (Heb. 11: 1 NKJV).

Redemption: Reconciliation. Deliverance from sin through Christ alone (Rom. 7: 24-25).

Brokenness: A state of despair or hopelessness. Not functioning properly, out of working order. Separated, interrupted or weakened (Dictionary.com).

Hope: Engaging in an attitude in believing that a change in circumstances will occur. Being in pursuit of a goal.

Shalom: I have learned from Dr. Villafañe about the word “Shalom” which means peace. During many moments in Dr. Villafañe’s class we learned several concepts involved in “seeking the peace of the city” through shalom.

A Brief Preamble To Living Systems Ministry and Mission

Living Systems Ministry and Missions emerged during God’s Creation.

Professor Hall says, “Living system ministry is modeled after the nature of the living systems that God made in his first creation.”¹⁴ God is the primary source for all of the life-long living systems throughout our universe for as long as we shall live. God has all the authority over living systems: “an orderly, highly complex and highly interrelated arrangement of living components that work together to accomplish a high-level goal when in proper relationship to each other.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 264.

¹⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, xxiv.

Dr. Hall describes Living System Ministry as the “participation with God as his life flows through his living systems.”¹⁶ In a Living System Ministry the practitioner is required to explore factors that influence behaviors. Some of the living systems that we are connected to are churches, neighborhoods, human lives, living creatures and cities.

While engaging in these living systems one must adopt the appropriate mental model. The mindset of the mental model approach is to view and act upon things from a Godly or Christ-like perspective. One goal of a Living System Ministry is to identify and nurture the aligned plans that a system already has in place. The identifying and nurturing response will aid the practitioner in hearing and responding to the needs of a social living system. In Living System Ministry or any other living systems the practitioner must continuously ask questions within the living system to gauge the goals to strive for and the progress, success or failures. By incorporating these engaging questions that have been put in place, one can guide the living system in the appropriate direction to reach a specific goal and outcome. Through redemptive thinking we began to absorb the nurturing and growing ways of Christ so that we can align ourselves with the will of God and God’s living system. Within this life we must seek to multiply the outcome of this Living System Ministry in order to fulfill what is pleasing to God in honoring His will.

Once one can begin to see where living systems are taking us, the idea of missions must be incorporated in this process of Living Systems Ministry. *Missions Ministry* is about doing God’s work. The commitment of being a servant of the Lord requires that you embrace the love of God toward others, participate and share in the helping with the needs of others. Missions involve the spirit of God working in our lives

¹⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, xxiv.

in ways that involve outreach to the people in neighborhoods and churches. Another way of thinking about missions, is to just simply think about doing the Bible by following the word, rules and being obedient.

Each moment as Jesus called a disciple into His ministry He said “follow me.” This seems clear to me that in order to do missions ministry, you must put Jesus first and follow Him. Missions require one to address, improve, or fix the needs of others. Missions might call for spiritual healing, hearing the gospel preached or lending a helping hand to someone. Each mission situation is different and each would have to be tailored to meet the need. Missions Ministry work is not always easy because there may not always be a quick fix to a situation. Missions Ministry forces you to become a problem solver. However, the idea of helping others through ministry is far more rewarding than the challenges that might emerge. Missions involve hearing and answering the call that God has placed in your life.

Primary and Secondary Culture

One very important component to living systems is that they involve two types of cultures that are described as primary and secondary cultures. The “Primary Culture” is observed as having personal relationship between individuals, friends, family members or extended family members. Within these primary relationships there exists a close bond and a level of trust in the relationships. The same primary relationships exist or should exist in Christian relationships. The easiest way to sum up primary culture is that it tends to be more personal in nature.

However, the “secondary culture” reveals more of a formal and impersonal social relationship among individuals, class and cultures. People who operate in a

secondary culture demeanor seem to be protective of their personality, written communication and space. Secondary cultures seem to function better in impersonal social settings rather than engaging in relational ties. The greatest challenge for the practitioner is to be able to identify the characteristics of both primary and secondary cultures and develop a way to make the sprocket and chain work together. As Living System Ministry continues to move forward the necessity for primary and secondary cultures working in unison is imperative to Living Systems Ministry and God's plan for mankind.

The significance of living systems and cultural systems will be mentioned in a later chapter on relationships to ex-offenders. Every aspect of our lives requires some sort of living system. Living systems are our survival mechanism that pushes us from one day to the next throughout our lifetime. Within God's living system we develop relationships with God and one another. Through that relational bond within Living System Ministry, things begin to take form when our participation with God allows His life to flow through His living system. Participation with God allows His cultivation of systems thinking to act through His living systems. Through God and systems thinking one can begin to see interrelated systems and understand the interconnectedness in relationship as a whole.

Whether it is good, bad or indifferent we all have to live by some living system. Everyone has the choice through free-will to decide on whose living system he/she will live. I prefer everyone to choose God's ways and the ministry of Jesus Christ. We must stick to God's plan for our lives in order to reap the harvest that awaits all believers.

The following figure will exhibit the contrast between primary and secondary cultures.

| <u>Primary Culture</u> | <u>Secondary Culture</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Relational need-satisfaction | 1. Economic need-satisfaction |
| 2. Extended family systems | 2. Nuclear or adaptive families |
| 3. Oral communication | 3. Written communication |
| 4. Informal learning | 4. Formal learning |
| 5. Spiritual explanations of reality | 5. Scientific, objective, cognitive explanations of reality |

Figure 1. The Contrast Between Primary and Secondary Cultures¹⁷

Living System Ministry is specific in its context with the association to primary and secondary cultures, but broad in the many components that are required in making things work within those cultures. Living System Ministry requires that the practitioner understand the cultural environment in order to address the needs of the people. During the practitioner's involvement with Living System Ministry he or she will become very familiar with poverty and degrees of brokenness with the communities that they minister. The practitioner's goal is to align himself or herself with God's living system in ministry.

Within Living System Ministry the practitioner is required to accept and realize his or her poverty. The practitioner must understand that we exist in a broken and fallen

¹⁷ Source: Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 21.

world. The practitioner must realize that the fruits of his or her labor must be aligned with the will of God's living system. As we embrace our poverty and fallen existence we must now look towards redemptive living through a redemptive ministry. We have come to realize that "redemption is at work when we confess and repent, receive Christ's forgiveness, and exchange our death for his life."¹⁸ Redemption requires one to take off or do away with the old self and put on the new self in order to be free from spiritual poverty.

In the Apostle Paul's message to the church and its leaders, he writes:

"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."
(1 Corinthians 3: 10-11)¹⁹

Here the Apostle Paul's message remind practitioners that in doing God's work in Living System Ministry one must begin with the right start by developing a good foundation that is specific to the needs of the people you are ministering or serving. Often as practitioners in ministry, we encounter many who are broken and fallen individuals. However, it is the practitioner's responsibility to lead a person to a place of redemption. In order to begin building a firm foundation in one's life, one must strive to become free from sin to enable himself or herself to serve God through Jesus Christ. Dr. Doug Hall says, redemption can be observed in three parts, namely "redemption is at work when (1) we confess and repent, (2) we receive Christ's forgiveness, and (3) we

¹⁸ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 129.

¹⁹ The Holy Bible, Zondervan New International Version Study Bible. General editor, Kenneth L. Baker, full rev. ed., Zondervan, 2011.

exchange our death for His life.”²⁰ With redemption one must take off the old self and become new again in Christ.

In understanding our cultural poverty, brokenness and fallen state, we can begin to take a look at the redemptive method as it relates to Living System Ministry and ex-offenders. This will be explained in Chapter Four. Living System Ministry is a highly complex system that encompasses specific components such as: physical, social and spiritual aspects of reality that act as one totally interrelated and interdependent system. Social systems vary in their description, they maybe a church, poverty, communities, prisons, culture, etc. All of these social systems are considered sub-living systems under the umbrella of God’s living system. Emanating from this highly complex system are the living creatures that God has made. When interacting with living creatures you will find a degree of complexity along the way because each encounter promotes new challenges, decisions and ideas.

However, there is another part to the living system design. This involves simple constructed material things or man-made items that we utilize from time to time in our lives. Within Living System Ministry one must remain focused on the physical, social and spiritual gifts that God has provided for us, while not giving great focus toward the material or superficial things. The dynamics of this complex living system involves interrelated interconnectedness in its physical, social and spiritual existence that fosters complex thought from time to time. Within a Living System Ministry the practitioner seeks to build relationships as his or her participation with God allows his life to flow through the living system that God has provided.

²⁰ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 129.

Presumptions

The following are presumptions contained in this thesis:

1. *God's Creation is the first template for a living system.* Looking towards the first creation, Doug Hall says, “we discovered that living system ministry is modeled after the nature of living systems that God made in his first creation.”²¹ A living system was created when “the Lord God formed the man from dust the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2: 7, NIV). Then the Lord God created other living creatures, animals and woman. God provided the Garden of Eden and the earth for living creatures to dwell. God provided man with the responsibility over all living creatures of the earth. However, the fall of man created another system of sin. This system of sin multiplies like a living system, but it is a dead system.
2. *The Word of God and Scripture are the foundation for Living System Ministry.* The scriptures tell us that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God”(John 1:1, NIV). The first chapter in the book of John reminds us that all things were made through Him and that His light became the life of man. God continuously reveals His living systems throughout the Bible. God directs each of us by His Word with our individual and collective living systems. The Word of God provides the foundation for living systems and Living System Ministry. In understanding God's intentions and design in living systems, Dr. Hall encourages us to view the corporate church as a living system and hear how God

²¹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 264.

speaks to an organic unity identified as the church.²² As Christians and according to scripture we recognize the body of Christ as one body and that the church is a living body.²³ The body is a unit made up of many parts, so, too, is the church.

3. *Living System Ministry has been emphasized more clearly in the Ministry of Jesus.* At the beginning of Jesus' Ministry, He called the disciples and directed them to follow Him. The disciples were commissioned by Jesus to go out and preach and teach the Word of God and cast out evil spirits (Mark 6: 12-13, NIV). Jesus commissioned the twelve and gave them authority to perform many ministry or evangelism tasks. Throughout Jesus' ministry He and the disciples traveled from city to city engaging in communities of living systems.
4. *God calls the practitioner to Living System Ministry and Mission.* The ministry practitioner is recognized in three categories: technicians, system actors and system thinkers.²⁴ As a Living System Ministry and Mission practitioner, one of the primary objectives is to bring understanding and living system concepts in alignment with God's plans for living systems. The Church has a significant obligation in developing and nurturing God's Living System Ministry through prayer, teaching, preaching while spreading love and humility to others.
5. *God has given grace, mercy, and forgiveness for the ex-offender and all mankind.* The Almighty God that we have come to know is loving, compassionate, forgiving, merciful and full of grace. God has created each one of us out of love. Although during our life journey one might stumble and fall,

²² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 49.

²³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 49-50.

²⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 226.

God continues to exhibit His love and forgiveness for those who repent.

Regardless of whether an ex-offender has sinned or has made a wrong decision in life, God can fix it. Not one of us is perfect or without sin. God uses us for His purpose at the appointed time. God works with each person individually. God hears and answers prayer. With “God’s grace, forgiveness of a wrong is obtained for personal sin. In addition, our ministry actions that result in unintended negative returns require forgiveness as well.”²⁵

Research Questions

With consideration to the aforementioned text, this preamble will explore the following research questions:

1. What are the factors to achieve spiritual renewal in the church?
2. How can the church minister to urban ex-offenders, bring them to Christ and reduce the recidivism rate?

In addition to the above research questions, here are some additional questions that have been used to make an informed decision.

1. What theological concepts can be extracted from the Bible regarding the significance of a Living System Ministry and Mission with ex-offenders? (Ch 3)
2. What information exists concerning Living System Ministry and imprisonment/ex-offenders? (Ch 2)
3. What role can the church play in Living System Ministry and the ex-offender? (Ch 4)

²⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 142.

4. How can the church become an important factor in reducing the recidivism rate in the urban communities? (Ch 4)
5. What methodologies can be implemented in the Living System Ministry to understand the ex-offender's needs and provide opportunities? (Ch 4)
6. How can the Living System Ministry practitioner promote and nurture spiritual renewal in the church for the ex-offender? (Ch 5)

CHAPTER ONE

GIVING RISE TO THE EX-OFFENDER

Jesus quote to the prophet Isaiah “The spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.”

----Isa 61: 1-2
(New International Version)

In the previous scriptural passage, Jesus shows His compassion toward the poor. Jesus sought to help those who were oppressed out castes, second-class citizens, women and children who were hungry. Jesus displayed His love and compassion toward the lowly ones. Jesus reveals Himself more to fallen people. In this fallen and broken world there are far too many people who have lost their way and find great difficulty in getting back on their feet. The day of redemption and salvation is the moment that many will rebuild their lives in Christ Jesus. The church has a vital role in restoring hope, discipleship and leading people to Christ through the good news of the gospel.

How does the church give Rise to Ministering to the Ex-offender?

I believe that there is not enough attention provided in ministering to the ex-offenders when they come to worship the Lord. Our charge as Christians is to be welcoming mentors, disciples, leaders, teachers and preachers of the Word. We should be able to minister and support the ex-offender in his or her growth in wanting to be more like Jesus. There are many individuals who have been released from prison and are cast back into society with very few resources or a lack of direction and an unsure

future. Many of these ex-offenders are worshiping in church right underneath our noises, needing help and support from day to day. Today, church ministries have become more diverse in ministering to the needs of others. Many ex-offenders have fallen, are broken and need a direction of hope. A living system ministry can provide a sense of hope to the ex-offender. As Christians and practitioners the Bible teaches us to extend our love and minister to the Jews and Gentiles. We must give rise to ministering to all of God's children.

Helping Others The Ex-offender

One might ask, "Are we doing enough in ministry in helping others in need"?

As leaders in ministry we not only have a calling to do the work of the Lord but we also have an obligation to serve the Lord by helping others who might be in need. Today the church must incorporate the dynamics of living systems and systems thinking into their ministries in an effort to meet the needs within its diverse ministries. Dating back as far as the beginning of time people have encountered or experienced the realities of imprisonment for some members of society. I began asking myself, how can the church minister to ex-offenders and promote spiritual renewal in the Church?

I believe that every church must be open and willing to help others with a nonjudgmental spirit when ministering to those who have fallen, are hurting or are broken. There is a need for the church to take a closer look at how its ministry is evaluating and addressing the needs of its worshipers. Continuous spiritual renewal is needed in all churches. Sometimes churches become set in their ways through a ritualistic or routine practice so they might not realize what is needed to sustain an ever-changing church/ministry. Spiritual renewal is necessary for the growth and the building

of the kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Through worship, faith, and prayer believers can attain a sense of spiritual renewal as they continue building a Christian relationship with God and other believers.

Ex-offenders have many of the basic needs that you and I have, but the process for meeting those needs has to be handled the right way. However, there are many ex-offenders that sit, stand and worship beside you everyday and you would never know that they are an ex-offender. It is so important to recognize that ex-offenders are people and forgiveness is what we are taught as Christians. The Ex-Offender Ministry will help open doors for the ex-offender that has been shut. One of the most difficult things for some ex-offenders is returning back into society after being released. Many of the privileges that they had prior to their incarceration have now been denied once they entered the prison system -- basic privileges like a driver's license, the right to vote and employment. Also, some educational institutions have revoked or denied their privileges to the ex-offender. However, through God's grace and mercy many ex-offenders will restore their lives, family and relationship with Christ.

Incarceration Rate in the United States

How do we rate the act of incarceration rate in the United States?

The 2010 census report for the Massachusetts incarceration rate by race or ethnicity is very alarming. Within the last four decades more than two million people nationally have been placed behind bars. Race or ethnicity, gender and community will reveal where are the disparities. It is reported nationally by the U. S. census, that Blacks are imprisoned five times more than Whites and Hispanics are twice as likely to be incarcerated than Whites. There is no doubt that the criminal justice system greatly

impacts our communities, families, churches, social and cultural systems.²⁶

The incarceration rate for the United States is considered the highest in the world. It is estimated that the U.S prisoner population “rate is 500 prisoners per 100,000 residents, where males make up 90 percent of the prison and local jail population. Most often the male prisoners are young and their rate of imprisonment is highest within ages ranging between 20 and early 30’s. The majority of prisoners tend to be poorly educated.”²⁷ In a study the Population Reference Bureau has reported that the United States has the world’s highest incarceration rate. The Northeast hold a high rate of incarceration, but the South and the West states greatly exceed the rate by almost double. As a result of the “tough-on-crime” initiatives in the South an increasing number of people were sentenced to prison for extended periods of time.²⁸

The following (Table 1) will show Male and Female Incarceration Rates by Region in 2010.²⁹

| | Total | Male | Female |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| United States | 500 | 943 | 67 |
| Northeast | 296 | 577 | 27 |
| Midwest | 389 | 735 | 53 |
| South | 552 | 1,039 | 78 |
| West | 418 | 772 | 60 |

Table 1. Male and Female Incarceration Rates by Region.

²⁶ U.S. Census 2010 Mass. Incarceration, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html

²⁷ Population Reference Bureau, www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2012/us-incarceration.aspx

²⁸ Population Reference Bureau, 2.

²⁹ Population Reference Bureau, 2.

The numbers in the previous chart (Table 1) “Total” column shows a smaller numeric variables that reflect the number of prisoners that were sentenced during the year 2010 per 100,000 U.S. residents.³⁰

It is very disheartening to know that our prisons are filled with a large number of black prisoners. The African American culture is in a major crisis and has been for too long. Our U.S. prison population is disproportionately flooded with blacks more especially black males between the ages 18 -34.³¹ The span of ages from 18-34 is a critical time for adult maturity and growth. It is extremely sad to see that many futures and lives have been destroyed as a result of incarceration.

The following (Table 2) will show a percentage of male incarceration by race, education and age:

| | 1990 | 2000 | 2008 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|
| White Men | 1.1 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| Less Than High School | 3.8 | 7.7 | 12.0 |
| High School Graduate | 1.4 | 2.3 | 2.0 |
| Some College | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Black Men | 8.3 | 11.2 | 11.4 |
| Less Than High School | 19.6 | 30.2 | 37.2 |
| High School Graduate | 7.1 | 11.7 | 9.1 |
| Some College | 2.9 | 2.1 | 2.1 |

Table 2. Percentage of Male Civilian Incarceration, by Race and Education, Ages 20-34.

³⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, *Prisoners in 2010*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p10.pdf>

³¹ *Population Reference Bureau*, 3.

Urban Boston

Historical Boston, Massachusetts was founded in 1630 and is considered one of the oldest cities in the United States. A few of the notable highlights that vibrant Boston has brought forth to Massachusetts are the American Revolution 1765-1783, Boston Tea Party in 1773 when the British wanted to place a tax on tea, Paul Revere's midnight ride to alert the colonial militia on the approach of British forces before the battles of Concord and Lexington and the Battle of Bunker Hill – 1775. Boston is known for other places like Beacon Hill, Massachusetts State House, the Freedom Trail, Boston Common, Boston City Hall, Faneuil Hall, the Underground Railroad Museum. Its notable events like the Boston Marathon, Championship Parades for the Boston Celtics, Boston Bruins, Boston Red Sox and the New England Patriots. Healthcare is also another notable feature in Boston, which includes its well-known hospitals.

During the 1940s through the 1980s and in earlier times some neighborhoods in Boston were in tough shape. Like many urban cities in every state across the country there existed sections of town that revealed poverty, hardships, crime, drugs and violence. For many urban Americans the implications of poverty were a way of life. The social, physical and cultural impact of poverty forced many people into survival mode. Struggling urban cultures and cities had to make do with what they had available to provide for their families and basic needs. There were abandoned/condemned buildings and houses with broken windows on almost every street. Trash, beer cans, soda cans and alcohol bottles littered the streets. Stolen and abandoned cars became a permanent fixture on the streets. There were street people sprawled out on the sidewalks heavily

intoxicated and passed out on the ground daily. By now you have probably figured out that Boston like many other cities has gone through a slum phase.

However, by the mid 1980s Boston began to clean up its appearance with cleanup initiatives throughout the city. The once dilapidated buildings were either sold for rehab projects or torn down so that new structures could be built in their place. By the end of the 1980s Boston was well on its way to rebuilding itself. One of the main influences that was strong in Boston and in many homes was the church. The church played a very significant role in structuring and shaping the lives of many families and most in particular children. Boston consisted of several churches of varying denominations in each neighborhood. On one block one might see a Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Catholic and Spanish storefront church all within close proximity to one another. The one thing that our parents instilled in us was church (Sunday School and then regular service). For many urban families church business was an all day affair that consumed much of your Sunday. By the time you arrived home from church the only time you had left was to eat Sunday dinner, then prepare your school clothes for Monday and get ready for bed.

As the society advances in years, one might ask what were some of the Urban

Environmental, Social & Cultural Hindrances

There are a number of variables that are contributing factors to the destiny of the person of color in urban society. There have been far too many instances where people of color are the target for incarceration more so than whites. For decades there existed a down-played systemic problem when it related to race and culture in urban United States. There is a domino affect to this problem. When the presumed dominant male

family source/provider is placed in prison his family suffers beyond his incarceration. In some instances there was the systemic idea of controlling the black male through incarceration because then the system has control over his family. This family has now become dependent upon a government system for everyday survival. So, too when the female becomes incarcerated and she has young children, a great burden is placed on the entire family. The experience of incarceration affects a family and causes enormous irreparable harm to a family who is now broken.

What is the Urban Culture In Boston with regards to The Streets And Survival

1970 - 1990

Here are two examples of how some minority individuals within an urban community were targeted during time periods:

1) During the 1970's in urban Boston many males of color on numerous occasions and sometimes on a daily basis were stopped and frisked by police as they traveled to and from home, to basketball practice or choir rehearsal, etc. Generally police daily in the urban community randomly stopped black youth and men. 2) During the mid to late 1980's groups of habitual criminal youth/teenagers predominantly within the urban sections of Boston gradually developed into gangs. At this time police and the community were reluctant to recognize these youthful offenders as a gang because the city refused to give them that recognition. At first these youth knew nothing about gangs. Many of the youth were acquiring illegal guns from the streets and began targeting youth in other urban neighborhoods and engaging in shootings with one another. During these shootings stray bullets were hitting and killing innocent bystanders/youth playing in front of their homes. It was not until the late 1980's that

these so called gang members began to specifically name themselves as particular gangs from a particular neighborhood. There was an outcry from the community for the police to do something about the shooting activity throughout the city and recent innocent deaths of bystander youth being shot.

This prompted by the mid to late 1980's in one urban city a caravan of police vehicles (called the sweep), which specifically patrolled and targeted black neighborhoods to put individual or their information into the criminal justice data base. The "Sweep" was supposed to target known criminals, criminal activity and individuals with outstanding warrants and get them off the streets. Instead, on some occasions the "sweep" patrols generally targeted blacks and Hispanics in the urban neighborhoods who were not engaged in criminal activity. There was one occasion where two eight or nine year old girls were jump roping on the side walk in front of their apartment while their mother watched from a second story window; the commander of the "sweep patrol" ordered their information to be obtained so that it could be entered in the systems data base later. Another supervisor's practice was to seek out black male youth playing basketball in urban communities and obtaining their information to be placed in a police database.

The initial intentions of Law Enforcement's "Sweep Patrol" were designed to search for and arrest criminals with warrants lurking the city streets. Instead the misuse of "Sweeps" on occasion was used to corral as many people of color in urban communities as possible, to obtain their personal identity and enter their name and other information in the system (data base). Once your name and identity is used against you in a legal system it diminishes your opportunity to progress in life. Now the future of

you, your family, your employment and your education is in jeopardy. In some respects the “Sweep Patrols” appeared to be a tagging or branding process to corral certain ethnic groups of people into the criminal justice system. Today this practice would be considered racial profiling. These types of misuse of authority make it very clear why a lot of changes in urban communities must be made. The same type of “sweeps” were not conducted in the white neighborhoods. There are many occasions where an unjust system targets individuals or groups of individuals to destroy or sabotage their future, damage their social status, and destroy the black family and thus to control a less desired ethnic group. Many Black Americans while living in the urban city experience stereotypes of being suspect, criminal, and drug dealing, violent or uneducated.

However, not all of the blame for people of color in urban communities is placed on the acts of the criminal justice system, government or police. Many of the events that result in an individual incarceration happen through people’s own actions and bad decisions that caused their arrest. The beginning of the 1990’s sparked a high rate of gang activity, violence, drugs, shootings and murders throughout Boston. The 1990’s marked one of the highest murder rates in Boston. It is everyone's responsibility to fix this stagnant problem of excessive incarceration. It rests within everyone to do his or her part. We all must seek to improve the incarceration situation for the benefit of healthier living systems and a better world. Since the 1990’s the City of Boston Police Department, clergy and several churches have engaged in relationships with the community and collaborative efforts to thwart violence and gang activity. During the 1990’s the murder rate in Boston reached 152 deaths. Also during that time it was the height of the gang wars. Today the city of Boston is in a much better place. The city of

Boston like other cities in America continue to have its share of criminal activity to contend with, but the effort to build relationships with individuals and the community is making a world of difference. By the mid to late 1990's a focus on Community Policing efforts were initiated in communities of Boston as well as other communities in Massachusetts.

The Systemic Cultural Harmful Effects Of Incarceration

What are some of the systemic cultural harmful effects of incarceration that affect a community?

Once a person has been incarcerated and obtains a CORI he or she is no longer eligible to vote or have a drivers license. Upon release the ex-offender is most likely to have difficulty getting employment. Here are only a couple of examples of how situations that one encounters in life that can change the outcome of one's destiny. Often these encounters leave physical, emotional and spiritual damage that builds into anger and resentment. This is not always the situation for every urban community; it only sheds some light on some of the things that take place in some communities. Clearly our urban cities are exposed to a broken system that needs to be fixed. Our criminal justice system needs an overhaul.

On July 14, 2015 President Barack Obama presented a speech during an NAACP National Convention on the unfairness of the criminal justice system. President Obama expressed concerns for shrinking the prison population, rehabilitating inmates instead of just locking them up.³² It is very sad to see in this country that there are more people of color in prison than the population of people of color in colleges. What is needed in

³² Leon Neyfakh, "Obama Wants to End Mass Incarceration." Slate Web, July 15, 2015, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.slate.com>

resolving the problem of over incarceration of the black population is that we all share in criminal justice reform.

Today, our communities and race relations need improvement. We need to reduce the incarceration and recidivism rate in this country. Through Living System Mission Ministry more opportunities and support must exist in an effort to aid in this urban crisis. When various cultures feel as though they are on the same playing field in society, then we might begin to see an improvement within communities.

Slavery In Urban America

Slavery in America began as the first slaves were kidnapped and transported to Jamestown, a colony in North America in 1619.³³ There were at least 15 states of the Union declared slave states in the south (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia). In 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation and Civil War declared that slavery had ended. With the stroke of a pen, President Abraham Lincoln made the abolishment of approximately 3 million slaves and ordered them to be set free in designated areas of the confederacy. Although slavery has ended many decades ago for some urban Americans the race and cultural struggles continue to exist. For many decades, offspring of freed slaves migrated to non-slave states and to Northern States. I mentioned slavery because for some urban cultures the aftermath of slavery is so severe that pain and wounds of our ancestors have been passed down from generation to generation. Our families and ancestors might have been subjected to harsh and cruel events of the past, but we must press forward and live our lives for the future and not the

³³ History.com Staff. *Slavery In America*, : A & E Networks, 2009, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>

past. If we harbor our pain and the injustices that we are subjected to, then it consumes and hinders our advancement in life. Peace in the city must become paramount in our living system and Christian relationships with one another.

Racial Tension In Urban Cities - 1960's

During the 1960's many urban cities were faced with racial tension and social identity issues. All across urban America in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, marches and religious movements for peace and justice took place. The emergence of the Black Power Movement took a strong position with political, social and cultural identity. Some groups displayed a more radical approach in declaring cultural identity and equality.

The remnants of slavery, racism and segregation in this country sparked many riots, protests, arrests and beatings of African American people in urban communities. African American men, women and children were beaten in the streets, hosed down with pressure hoses by the fire department, attacked by police K-9's and arrested.

A Religious Ambassador For Peace and Non-Violent Protest:

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

However, during this time of tension and anxiety, God brought in a religious ambassador who advocated peace in America. In 1963 Reverend, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist preacher, led non-violent and peaceful marches and protests to stop the injustices and inequalities waged against African American people. During this time everything was segregated for blacks such as schools, churches, businesses, public bathrooms, seating on public busses and water fountains. The government, at that time was predominately a white society and the police department were so angrily opposed to Rev. Dr. King Jr.'s peaceful protest that he was jailed in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr.

King and many others were willing to go to jail for their cause in taking a stand against the injustices towards African Americans. As a result of Dr. King taking this stand, the Civil Rights Movement began to emerge. Over time the Civil Rights Movement took form and reached every urban community in America.

One thing that deserves closer examination is social justice in the urban communities in America. Social justice, human rights, equitable treatment, cultural and gender bias are contributing factors that alter many lives and result in harsh outcomes.

Moral Injury

Many who have grown up in an urban city have observed and experienced many horrific situations relating to death, homicide, shootings, stabbings and assaults. These traumatic events are so frequent that over a period of time one becomes desensitized to the situation. The individuals that witness or experience these difficult events become exposed to “moral injury.” Moral Injury is described as “an injury to an individual’s moral conscience resulting from an act of perceived moral transgression which produces profound emotional shame.”³⁴ Usually moral injury is associated with soldiers that have seen and experienced a lot of death during combat situations and now suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In urban communities many individuals can be associated with a degree of moral injury because of the tragic events that they have experienced and from which they suffer with PTSD symptoms as well. Moral Injury comes with its share of psychological, emotional, cultural and spiritual effects. The African American culture has endured many struggles over the years from Slavery, Jim

³⁴ Brett Litz, *Moral Injury*. Wikipedia Internet Encyclopedia, accessed July 10, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_injury

Crow Laws, Civil Rights Movement, Brown vs. Board of Education, Bussing in the 1970's, and now the crisis of Mass Incarceration.

Today, there have been many improvements and accomplishments regarding social and race relations in society, but we are not quite there yet. As a community we still have some ways to go. I am optimistic that through Living System Ministry and Mission a lot can and will be accomplished as we put God first in our lives.

The Effects of Broken System

As a community in distress, how can we classify the effects of broken system in today's world?

In the 20th century, war has left a mark on our people. First the United States was engaged in World War I (1914-1918), then in World War II (1941-1945) and later the Vietnam War from 1955-1975. Many men from every community were drafted into the military service to fight in the wars of their time. The service men and women returned to the broken urban cities with many emotional, physical and psychological issues relating to PTSD, drug addiction and a country that did not appreciate the sacrifice that they made for their country. It was not until many years later during the Gulf Wars that the United States began to express recognition and support to the service men and women for the sacrifices that they made for our liberty. In whatever wars that our men and women have fought for our country they returned home broken and wounded physically, mentally and emotionally. Today an effort is being made through Congress and the VA to address some of the concerns and support for our soldiers.

Urban Boston As A Broken Surviving City

Although Urban Boston seemed to be a broken surviving city, yet during the late 1940's to about the early 1980's Boston appeared to be an eyesore with many abandoned buildings, streets littered with trash, empty soda and beer cans. As a result of slums and deplorable housing in Boston, MA during the 1950 – 1970's the Redevelopment Authority decided to launch a new initiative in 1980 to improve their urban neighborhoods. During the 1990's the urban neighborhoods of Boston were plagued with the birth of gang violence and the highest homicide rates of 152 homicides. Every community has experienced its degree of events in the past, but the focus today should represent moving forward by building relationships in our communities for our future and bringing shalom to cities across America. Keeping in mind the numerous cultural, racial, economic and class hindrances that many have faced for years, even decades, the Christian practitioner must engage in the mindset of asking: How can this ministry help others in overcoming their obstacles in life and move forward beyond their circumstances? Despite whatever the struggle may have been in life, the task is not to look back, but to look forward toward a healthier lifestyle and a stronger relationship with Christ.

Today, communities, governments and criminal justice systems must reform their way of thinking as it relates to incarceration. This society should refrain from the process of locking people up and throwing away the keys. The reality is that individuals are incarcerated for a specified period of time and then are released. Once an ex-offender has been released it is our mission as Christians to assist anyone who seeks to improve their life. Earlier I mentioned the alarming incarceration rate in the U.S. by race, region

and gender. However, the recidivism rate is just as disheartening to accept. Recidivism is a huge problem because when a person is not deterred from returning to prison, then the judicial system has failed to rehabilitate an offender. The best approach to rehabilitate a person is to provide them with positive options and resources to help them succeed or reach their goals.

Recidivism Rate

The Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted studies on the recidivism rate during the 1980's and 1990's. It is reported that most prisoners who are released from prison usually return back to prison within three years following their release.³⁵

The following Chart in Table 3, is a 2014 One-Year Recidivism Rate Chart, Including and Excluding Re-Incarcerations for Technical Violations by Type of Release and Gender:

| Recidivism Rates by Release Type and Gender - <u>Excluding</u> Technical Violations of Parole or Probation | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| | Males | | | Females | | | Total | | |
| Release Type | Number Releases | Rec | Rate | Number Releases | Rec | Rate | Number Releases | Rec | Rate |
| Parole To Street | 542 | 38 | 7% | 141 | 10 | 7% | 683 | 48 | 7% |
| Expiration of Sentence | 1,274 | 132 | 10% | 480 | 64 | 13% | 1,754 | 196 | 11% |
| Total Releases | 1,816 | 170 | 9% | 621 | 74 | 12% | 2,437 | 244 | 10% |
| Recidivism Rates by Release Type and Gender - <u>Including</u> Technical Violations of Parole or Probation | | | | | | | | | |
| | Males | | | Females | | | Total | | |
| Release Type | Number Releases | Rec | Rate | Number Releases | Rec | Rate | Number Releases | Rec | Rate |
| Parole To Street | 542 | 131 | 24% | 141 | 35 | 25% | 683 | 166 | 24% |
| Expiration of Sentence | 1,274 | 132 | 10% | 480 | 69 | 14% | 1,754 | 201 | 12% |
| Total Releases | 1,816 | 263 | 15% | 621 | 104 | 17% | 2,437 | 367 | 15% |

Table 3. One Year Recidivism Rates: 2014 Release Cohort. Massachusetts Department of Correction.

³⁵ Richard Freeman. The Urban Institute Reentry Roundtable Discussion Paper: *Can We Close the Revolving Door? Recidivism vs. Employment of Ex-offenders in the U.S.* , (May 19-20, 2003), 8.

Many inmates were released to the community then paroled with conditions and supervision. Some released offenders chose not to abide by the conditions that were set for them and their parole was revoked. The inmates were re-incarcerated.³⁶

The effort here is to develop a ministry that ministers to the ex-offender and his/her family. I will attempt to promote an environment for spiritual renewal for the ex-offender. The church plays a vital role in developing a safe, comfortable, spiritual and Christian environment for ministry. The church cannot solve all of the ex-offender's issues, but Christian practitioners must do all that needs to be done to assist the ex-offender and reduce the recidivism rate in the United States.

Foundations Of Hope

What many ex-offenders might need is a fresh start getting back into the community after their release from prison is a sense of hope. He/she needs the faith to believe that things can get better. Faith is derived through prayer, hearing and reading the word of God. Allowing God to speak through His word and presence will help one in sustaining hope. One must believe that God is an ever-present help and provider. I often say to myself daily: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil.4: 13).

The Church

Dating as far back as the ministry of Jesus and even today the church has a vital responsibility in ministering to the needs of others. The church consists of an assembly of believers who have been called to follow Jesus Christ. In this project one will realize that "the kingdom of God is the primary paradigm for understanding God's call to the

³⁶ Thomas A. Turco III et al, *One Year Recidivism Rates: 2014 Release Cohort*. Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Brief, (2016), 3.

church in the city.”³⁷ As Christians each of us is commissioned to love one another, help, pray, support and share the Gospel. The Church is a foundation for restoring hope and peace throughout the world. The church exists in one’s heart, but the church is also a physical place for worshipping God. The church is the universal body of Christ. It is the church’s mission to promote (*shalom*) peace in the city and within the church. The church at some point could be faced with the question asked and answered by Robert C Linthicum: “How has the kingdom of God become embodied and made real in the city’s people of God? God’s primary intention for any city is to bring God’s kingdom into that city----to permeate its political, economic, and religious structures, to transform the lives of its inhabitants, to exorcise evil and unrepentant principalities and powers, and to place over that city, not a brooding angel but a Christ who would gather the city to himself. It is God’s intention to transform every city into the city of God by making of that city the embodiment of God’s rule. God would seek to do this in every city by creating in that city a new community: the church.”³⁸

The Church: A Place of Worship for Everyone

Members and leaders of Concord Baptist Church will influence the physical setting for this Ex-offender Ministry. This setting will welcome, embrace, mentor and minister to the ex-offender. I anticipate developing this Ex-offender Ministry within Concord Baptist Church of Milton, MA, which will serve as the host: a house of prayer and a place of worship for this ministry. I seek to develop a ministry that will assist and address some of the concerns of the ex-offender or juvenile offenders who have had

³⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 105.

³⁸ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 105.

some exposure to the criminal justice system. The ministry will assist and establish resources in an effort to help the ex-offender grow personally and in ministry. The ministry will provide guidance to the ex-offender in various areas. The primary goal of the ex-offender ministry will be to minister to ex-offenders and assist in meeting some of their needs.

Concord Baptist Church of Boston in Milton, MA: Historical Overview

The Physical Setting for this Ex-Offender Ministry will be influenced by members and leaders of Concord Baptist Church.

Historical Background: Concord Baptist Church was established in 1916 and was located at 14 Northfield Street, Boston, MA (the home of Sister Lydia Glover).

Membership continued to grow and a new location was established at 69 West Concord Street in the South End of Boston. Later in 1946 Concord Baptist Church once again changed its location to 190 Warren Ave. /West Brookline Street in the South End, Boston, MA. A growing residential, political and residential parking climate cast a strain on Concord Baptist Church, its worshipers and many of the church services. On September 18, 2011 Concord Baptist Church made another transition to a new location at 180 Blue Hill Av., Milton, MA.³⁹

The total active membership of Concord Baptist Church for 2011 is: 859. There are 251 Males and 608 Females. The total membership in the church for 2011 is 1361 members on the books. The total membership incorporates children and adults.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Concord Church of Boston, *80 Years on the Christian Walk 1916-1996* (United States: Concord Baptist Church, Frank Lucas and Diahanne Lucas, 1996), 5-7.

⁴⁰ Concord Baptist Church of Boston, *2011 Annual Church Meeting Report (unpublished)*, 9.

The total active membership for the following years are: (2007) 906 members, (2008) 874 members, (2009) 932 members, and (2010) 975 members.

The social/ethnic make-up of worshipers in the church predominantly consists of African/West Indian cultures. There are a small number from other ethnic backgrounds that add to the ethnic diversity within the church. Concord Baptist embraces all who come to worship. I believe that a Christian bears no ethnicity when it involves worshiping, serving and honoring the “Will of God.”

Concord Baptist Church has several ministries

General Categories of Ministries: The Ministry of Jesus Christ, Ministerial Staff Ministry, Discipleship Ministry, Welcome Ministry, Deacon & Deaconess Ministry, Usher Ministry, Medical Ministry, Music Ministry, New Members Ministry, Praise & Worship Ministry, Sunday School Ministry, Women’s Ministry, Brother to Brother Ministry, Liturgical Dance Ministry, Basketball Outreach Ministry, Food Pantry Ministry, Prison Outreach Ministry, Youth Ministry and Young Adult Ministry.

As people continue to share their passions/spiritual gifts and express their call to serve in one of the ministries in the church more ministries continue to emerge. During 2016 Concord Baptist Church of Milton, MA celebrated its Centennial year of 100 Years in ministry.

CBC’s Past Prison Ministry Involvement

The former membership of Concord Baptist Church Prison Ministry consisted of members who had a desire and a passion to serve on the ministry. The members would go into the jails to mentor, minister and pray with participants/inmates. However, there were some criteria that needed to be met within the prison ministry, namely, for the

ministry participants to be screened with a CORI Background Check. Ministry participants were required to attend orientation meetings.

What did the prison ministry involve?

The prison ministry involved: 1) Visitations, 2) Worship Service and 3) Bible Study.

Who were the participants (members, leadership, and ex-offender)?

The participants for the prison ministry consisted of several church members. Any members who were involved in the prison ministry were required to submit to a CORI check prior to participating in the prison ministry or entering any jail/prison facility.

Were there any hindrances within the ministry?

The hindrances to the prison ministry developed when there was an inadvertent change within the Sheriff Department's administration. As there was a new sheriff in town, the efforts of the church's prison ministry slowly began to fade away when the incoming sheriff focused more on their administrative agenda for the correctional institution.

What were the successes of the prison ministry?

The prison ministry prepared inmates for re-entry into the community and church environment through mentoring, praying and Bible Studies.

What were the failures of the prison ministry?

The real failure of the prison ministry was the lack of cooperation and a lack of support from the county's prison/jail system. The greatest failure emerged by not being able to deliver the Word of God to others who were in need.

What happened to the prison ministry?

The prison ministry was brought to an end because the County Jail/Prison Administration placed the church on hold for an undetermined length of time and never extended the opportunity to establish a new connection to the church's outreach prison ministry.

A Positive and Safe Environment in the Church

Today it is essential that all churches develop a safe environment for clergy, staff, parishioners, visitors, men, women and children. A safe and positive environment involves everyone. Some might wonder why the issue of a safe and positive environment has come up; but it is an expectation of parishioners and members who are attending church to serve and worship the Lord. The idea of a safe environment reaches far beyond its general term. The idea of a safe environment requires a specific attention to what one wants to make safe in whatever environment that exists in the church. Creating a safe environment with adequate security has become a ministry in of itself.

The issue and major focus of a safe environment for children stems from the more than three-decade long Catholic Church scandal that involved priests' victimizing children. Today churches have to assess their church and custom fit what they require for a safe environment. A safe environment plan can begin with the basics: making sure that no children are left unattended, make sure that all staff, clergy, and members who are interacting with children have a CORI check, making sure that the doors to the church lock from the outside after regular church hours, etc. An effort to making the environment of the church a safe place might require that the integrity of ethics are not jeopardized.

A safe environment can mean different things. Each church must establish what safety precautions are suitable for their church environment. Today churches must consider precautions on making the church safe on the inside and outside of its ministries. A safe environment can cover a wide range of situations from building security, personal security, a safe environment for women and children, etc.

As Living System Ministry and Mission presses forward in its efforts to minister to people in the church who are in need, great challenges will emerge as one sifts through numerous degrees of brokenness. For some people the only living system that they are most familiar with is a survival living system (the street survival). In street survival individuals adapt to whatever circumstance that they can in order to get by. Sometimes street survival decisions come with ugly consequences. However, Living System Ministry seeks to assist one in making healthy and positive Christian choices. As we learn more about living systems we begin to learn much about ourselves and what our needs are. After accessing your needs through a living systems lens, then one needs to take action and follow through with a plan to address the specific need.

God's Work Through Living System Ministry: The Ex-offender Ministry

During God's creation, God had good intentions for the world and all living creatures, more especially mankind. In all that we endeavor to do in life as Christians, we must put God first in our life pursuits as we journey through the daily complexities of living systems and ministry. The presence of God the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are intentional in our lives by God's design. In saying, "The kingdom of God is within you," Jesus' intention for humanity is that all might experience the transformation of their own inner poverty. Entering into God's kingdom means to come

into contact with the inner self, to respond to God's saving action in our lives, and under that protective love to begin discovering our full personality ---- our strengths, our weaknesses, our potentials, and the evil and good powers at work within us."⁴¹

Furthermore, the practitioner will need many skillsets while multi-tasking to navigate ministering to the needs of ex-offenders and others. The Christian practitioner will find him/herself ministering, disciplining, teaching, mentoring and assisting others. Developing a method for monitoring the progress of the ministry will serve as a useful tool to meet goals and objectives. God will pour out His love and grace on all who seek to do His will while ministering to others.

⁴¹ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*. 104.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPLEX SYSTEMS OF PRISONERS AND EX-OFFENDERS

As we move forward in our endeavoring pursuit in Living System Ministry and Mission with ex-offenders, we will experience the complexities and challenges of systems while attending to the pending needs of people. This being said, the church and its Biblical/theological approach in urban ministry while incorporating Living System Ministry and Mission in its disciplines has an important task ahead. The literature that you are about to embark upon in this thesis-project will include the following categories: 1) Complex Systems, 2) Prisoners, 3) Ex-offenders, 4) The Urban Community, 5) Discipleship, 6) Shalom, 7) Internet Sources. The texts that are incorporated with the above categories reflect a foundation of literary sources for the practitioner's presentation.

1. Complex Systems

Within this ever-changing world that we live in we will at some point experience the complex systems that control and direct every aspect of our lives. We live with emotional and physical complexities. The emotional complexities involve our decision making process while the physical complexities relate to procedural/system structure. Complex systems change the ways in which we think and do things. The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Complex/Living Systems is God's Creation. Through a secondary culture understanding we can grasp the process of all the living systems that God Created. The living system was not complex for God to create, but for mankind sometimes we struggle to live within the realm of God's living system. Many living

systems appear complex when first introduced, but as time continues we learn to adapt to change and incorporate the aspects of these systems in our personal, professional and spiritual lives. Over time we can overcome the complexities that are associated with complex systems. Some of the complexities that emerge from complex living systems is that, when we seek to assist someone with a problem at some point, other symptoms affect us in some way. Dr. Hall describes this process as Insensitivity to Parameter Change.⁴² Complex or Living systems tend to identify how primary and secondary cultures have evolved. The primary culture identifies with the oral, face-to-face communication and spiritual approach to life. The secondary culture is associated with the written, educational and scientific approach to life.

The literature in this section, which will provide insight into complex systems, involves: *The Cat and The Toaster: Living System Ministry In A Technological Age*, written by Douglas Hall, Judy Hall and Steve Daman; Jay Forresters 'Notes on *Complex Systems*' in *Urban Dynamics* and the *Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge.

The Cat & the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age, Doug and Judy Hall and Steve Daman, 2010.

The Cat & the Toaster book deals with Living System Ministry. Through Living System Ministry, we discover “the fruit that remains” and the fruit that multiplies. “Multiplication is the natural outcome of living system ministry.”⁴³ Living Systems primarily deal with what God has created.

⁴² Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 246-247.

⁴³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 247.

Complex Living Systems

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Complex living systems is God's Creation. Dr. Hall's book on complex living systems identifies how primary and secondary cultures have evolved. The understanding of "complex living systems" is helpful to this project, because it provides insight into the changing dynamics of human and social interaction. "We must embrace the right mental models relative to living systems. In our relationship with Jesus Christ we learn that His ways are higher than ours, and, through a consistent process of redemptive thinking, we internalize his ways of growing and nurturing what is alive."⁴⁴

Dr. Hall shares in his book some insight on *Understanding Our Times, Embracing Our Poverty, Discovering Our Wealth, Aligning Our Actions, Opening Our Doors and Beginning Our Journey*.

Understanding Our Times

Dr. Hall begins his first chapter by getting the reader to think about God's creation, the fall and a closer look into God's redemptive story. It is true that we live in a fallen world, but Dr. Hall points us in the direction of God's grace and salvation. Because of the fall, each church must continuously evaluate what its mission and ministry is doing. The church must be in sync with the times of today so that it can be better equipped to nurture the growing cultural and spiritual demands that arise.

⁴⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, xxiii.

Overwhelmed By Complexity

The Halls new living environment was sometimes challenging because of a lack of cultural diversity. The Halls were accustomed to interacting with people from various backgrounds and for the moment this was not the case as they felt isolated from what they were used to. Finally, the Halls found their way to a family mission called the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston that provided a gospel service and outreach for people in the neighborhood.

As the Halls began their new missions journey, they found themselves stretched in many different directions that sometimes became overwhelming and filled with complexities. Their missionary task often involved meeting the needs of others, which carried its own set of challenges. Not only were the Halls missionaries, but they were also building superintendents who always had something that needed to be fixed. The Halls show us that sometimes in the task of doing missions work our lives can become fragmented, chaotic and overwhelming, but you must stay the course and use the resources that are available in an effort to meet our goals and the needs of others.

Doing The Bible: Dr. Hall describes his concept “doing the Bible” as aligning the events of his life with the written word of God, with a passion to do the truth. Dr. Hall says: “By ‘doing the Bible’ I mean that I want to see that the things that happen in my life are biblical things, the experiences, and the patterns I see working in the lives of people in the Bible.”⁴⁵

In “*The Cat and the Toaster*,” Dr. Hall speaks about multiplication. “We believe that God can change things... Transplanting a vision and implanting a construct will

⁴⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 13.

yield returns of multiplied productivity that can make possible percentage change in an entire system over the long term. Through living system ministry, we discover “the fruit that remains” and the fruit that multiplies. Multiplication is the natural outcome of living system ministry.”⁴⁶

Living Systems Ministry has many twists and turns to understanding its complexities and functionality. Living System Ministry helps us to align ourselves with what God makes compared to what man has made. Living systems are associated with the living things that God has created. The toaster is associated with what man has made.⁴⁷ The difference between the cat and the toaster is that one can be reassembled (toaster); the cat cannot be reassembled.

Understanding My Culture

In Dr. Hall’s presentation of living systems I have learned that each concept is uniquely identified in how they relate to one another. As we think about human cultures we learn that they can be explored from two perspectives: primary culture and secondary culture. Primary Culture deals with the relational, oral, face-to-face communication. Secondary Culture deals more with written communication. The first living system that emerged in this universe is God’s living system called the “Creation” as it is described in the Holy Bible in the Book of Genesis. Doug and Judy Hall exercised their dichotomy of close personal *primary relationships* v. *impersonal secondary relationships*. These two relational patterns were very different and many people find difficulty navigating

⁴⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 246-247.

⁴⁷ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 53-55.

from one to the other.⁴⁸ Primary cultures are dependent more upon relational ties with one another, while secondary cultures are not. Although both primary and secondary cultures have their distinct characteristics, the needs of each are met. Primary and secondary cultures can possess two distinct approaches to doing something and still attain the same results of a goal. Within the primary culture people work together to accomplish their work.⁴⁹

Embracing Our Poverty and Discovering Our Wealth

Everyday the Christian resides in a world of poverty. Our poverty lies within the realm of a fallen world that we are all a part of. For many urban communities poverty is experienced in many ways. Physical poverty and the lack of resources is one reality for some. And, spiritual poverty is another that leaves one broken and desiring a sense of hope. The poverty that some Christians face is the subconscious mental poverty. Sometimes, although our intentions might be great our mindset or approach to ministry and addressing the needs of others can be flawed and not in aligned with the ways of the Bible.

Dr. Hall shares that through admitting your poverty you will discover your wealth and be able to receive the refined gold, the richness and the white clothes that Jesus is speaking about in Rev. 3:18. We all must find our poverty in order to align ourselves with the harmony of God and His living system.

This is not to say that we are not Christians or good people, it only means that we might have to relinquish our personal biases and develop a more biblical approach to

⁴⁸ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 17.

⁴⁹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 21.

doing ministry. Dr. Hall introduces the idea of mental models as: “an inner understanding that tells us how to take action.”⁵⁰ Strengthening and developing the concept of mental models will change our perception, our actions and thought process for doing ministry God’s way. In an effort to embrace our poverty one must understand that realizing our tendency toward avoiding our counterproductiveness often is the most beneficial approach in the mental model concept. With embracing our poverty, we recognize that if we view things in ministry from “The Works Method” we have to first realize that we live in a fallen world. Then we can identify a need, then develop a plan to meet the need, do the plan by taking action, and then receive returns. This will help us produce real wealth in God’s kingdom.⁵¹ Works Method will only work if we realize our fallenness first.

Dr. Hall gravitates towards the “Redemptive Treasures” because it helps us to realize our fallenness and directs us to seek God the Father and Jesus Christ for salvation. As one confesses and repent of their sins, then it is through salvation that one will receive redemption. Dr. Hall points out that: “redemption is at work when we confess and repent, then we receive Christ’s forgiveness, and we exchange our death for his life.”⁵² Dr. Hall leads his readers to the cross with his two dimensions of redemption, the “vertical and horizontal.” While looking at the direction of the vertical redemption idea we understand that “the cross points upward toward God, who is the source of all life and all redemption. God’s peace points down toward us. His Son, true God, came to

⁵⁰ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 89.

⁵¹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 125.

⁵² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 129.

be true Man in the world he had created, to be with us.”⁵³ Now, the crosspiece horizontal redemption shows that redemption extends to our eternal destiny in heaven and to our lives and relationships with people in the world we live in. The gift of forgiveness that God extends to us, we are expected to share the gift of forgiveness toward others.⁵⁴

Aligning Our Actions

For the most part, our plans are derived and aligned from social systems. The progress in ministry is supported through teamwork. Dr. Hall mentions some of the tools that are needed to align our actions/plans: Reflective Writing, Reflection Model, Hearing and Responding to Social System Request. The Halls by chance happened upon the “act of writing and reflecting on the systems around them that guided them in observing the aligned plans of living systems.”⁵⁵ The Halls present a more refined description of the aligned plans in a living system. Within the aligned plans of a living system the Halls point out that, “God places us in families...and together we work as a ministry team, sharing vision and an inner drive to see our city come alive in Christ. The inner drive called the ‘find-a-way-spirit’ helps us learn to see the system in high definition.”⁵⁶ In this book, *The Cat and the Toaster*, the Halls take you through many diverse approaches to doing ministry in living systems and many of the approaches are inclusive or dependent upon one another. Within the action and reflection model of ministry the Halls are engaged in an array of activities, reflecting on their usefulness,

⁵³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 132.

⁵⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 132.

⁵⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 195.

⁵⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 196.

and making the necessary adjustments as they are needed.⁵⁷

In *Hearing and Responding to A Social Systems Request* the Hall's take an active journey in responding to the needs of living systems within the neighborhood. Their call in a ministry concern or need led them to provide their efforts and attention to neighborhoods that were in jeopardy of being torn down, to a Latino couple who wanted space for a meeting, to the encouragement of Christian Black education and to assisting in the encouragement of churches to network together to develop cooperative and evangelistic open-air meetings.⁵⁸ The Halls have shown the readers that Living System Ministry reaches far beyond one set method or concept for doing ministry.

Opening Our Doors

Jesus waits for us to let Him into our lives. In our free will Jesus wants us to seek Him. Jesus provides the opportunity for us to establish a relationship with Him.

With opening our doors in Living System Ministry there are things one must consider: the role of the practitioner, working with God and the way to multiplication. Today, in this Living System Ministry we have come to know the Ministry Practitioner as one who is engaged in the actions of Christian ministry... There are three types of *Ministry Practitioners: technicians, system actors, and system thinkers*.⁵⁹ To keep it simple the "Technicians are ministry practitioners who live their lives with a strong focus on low-level task and constructs... The effectiveness of the technician is derived from their ability to discern the living systems around them and properly integrate their

⁵⁷ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 196.

⁵⁸ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 197.

⁵⁹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 226.

work within the living system.”⁶⁰ In our pursuit in understanding the process of opening our doors we might take a look at “*System Actors*” who are representatives of God that brought forth the Quiet Revival. System Actors usually are derived from primary culture and are identified as faithful people of prayer and servants of God who faithfully serve Him according to the spirit.⁶¹ Finally, we get to know the System Thinkers as a people who use “high-level perception, intuitiveness, or subconscious understanding to go beyond the limits of the conscious mind, but then cognitively recapture what has been learned in order to apply that learning to future ministry.”⁶²

Working With God

We have been called into the ministry by the authority and anointing of Jesus for the purpose of fulfilling the will of God. All that we do in our lives personally and physically is derived from God’s authority and His allowance of free will. As Christians and ministry practitioners working with living systems, we work to serve God and the ministry of Jesus Christ by meeting the needs of others. Dr. Hall reminds us as practitioners, “we learn to participate in meeting needs by transplanting living subsystems and implanting inorganic constructs into the living social system.”⁶³

Multiplication

In Living System Ministry we learn that multiplication relates to a percentage change in the productivity of the whole part of ministry that we work toward. “Living system ministry helps us see more clearly ‘the fruit that remains’ and the fruit that

⁶⁰ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 227.

⁶¹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 229.

⁶² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 231.

⁶³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 236.

multiplies. Multiplication is described as the natural outcome of living system ministry.”⁶⁴

Beginning Our Journey

In this final chapter the Halls share their comparisons of the first creation and the thought of God’s new creation. Within the first creation we have learned from the Book of Genesis all that God created. As the Halls directed their attention towards the first creation they realized that “living system ministry is modeled after the nature of living systems that God made in the first creation.”⁶⁵

The Halls are expressively motivated in seeing how the forever perfect new creation plays out in urban communities. They talk about how “a city, made in heaven, settles down to earth.”⁶⁶ We must embrace the gifts that God has provided us with and utilize our spiritual, physical and technological gifts towards expressing the creative nature of God. The Halls believe “we have to turn our old ideas of what ministry is like and of what heaven is like completely around, and start to see ministry and heaven as practical...as we align our actions and our minds to the high-level order of living system ministry.”⁶⁷ Within the old and new creation God is in control.

⁶⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 247.

⁶⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 264.

⁶⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 264.

⁶⁷ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 265.

Urban Dynamics, Jay W, Forrester. *Notes on Complex Systems, Chapter Six*.

This is an exploration into Jay Forrester's complex systems. Jay Forrester is the founder of "Systems Thinking," which is depicted in the book, *Urban Dynamics*. The parameters that are contained in the system thinking process involve complex systems, simple systems, and big systems. Forrester's "Systems Thinking" concepts provide insights into the complex realm of social realities. Forrester's system is designed to tackle large social problems in a complex world and provide a method for getting things done in social environments and in ministry.

I begin this exploration into the realm of Jay Forrester's Complex Systems by viewing five of his concepts. Some of Forrester's concepts involve: *Resistance to Policy Changes, Control Through Influence Points, Corrective Programs Counteracted by the System, Long-Term Versus Short-Term Response, and Drift to Low Performance*.

The systems thinking concept reminds me of a bicycle and the mechanisms that make it work. In order for a bicycle to work you need two wheels, spokes, axle and rear tire sprocket; then you need two pedals, pedal sprocket and a link chain. When all of the components of the bicycle are put together properly they must perform in concert in order to make the bike run efficiently. When one of the components on the bike that does not function properly, then the dysfunction creates a complex system.

In a general context, the church that exists in every community is a ministry in itself and within that church there are many other ministries that branch out to the congregation. Communities are in need of various types of ministries, and system thinking is going to be the vehicle that binds ministries and communities together. The only way for systems thinking to work within a ministry, the ministry would have to be

the root foundation for the short and long-term success of the community's outcome. Ministries have to work hand in hand together to address community issues.

What is a complex system?

A *complex system* is a relationship of cause and effect that is filled with diverse and difficult parameters. Many complex systems are unpredictable and difficult to understand. Complex Systems have no more reliability than playing the lottery, investing in the stock market, or knowing what encounters you might face from one day to the next. One could view complex systems as unpredictable situational occurrences that influence the way we act and react to one another and systems.

As we continue in our attempt to understand complex systems and the many components that emerge from its branches, we find that there appears to be an infinite level of other systems and sub-systems that grow from each of these branches. The Book of John speaks of the Vine and the Branches in *John 15: 1-2*, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*" Each set of these complex components arrives with a set of its own complex systems. From the time that we are born we are placed into a complex system of life, emotions, decisions, actions and reactions. All of these factors are affected by internal and external conditions that map out one's current and future aspirations. "System Thinking" involves getting to the root of a system problem and then finding ways to correct and control the situation at hand. Some complex systems require immediate attention while other complex systems require a more concentrated effort to resolve the issues.

Here Jay Forrester shares his concepts and explanations on complex systems. Complex systems are structures that cause frustration and many failures when attempting to improve behaviors. Jay Forrester describes complex systems as a “high-order, multiple-loop, nonlinear feedback structure.”⁶⁸ A complex system is also a “interlocking structure of feedback loops. Feedback loops pertains to the environment around any decision point in a system (private, public, conscious and unconscious).”⁶⁹

Insensitivity to Parameter Change:

Jay Forrester describes a process called “*Insensitivity to Parameter Change*” and what he says is that regardless of how many aspects of a problem you address, your efforts are still not enough to solve the problem.⁷⁰ Sometimes you can do all that you can to help someone with their addiction, personal problems, physical problems, social problems, finances, housing and legal issues, but in the end sometimes a person will fall back into the same circumstances that you have tried to help them get out of. Sometimes the individual personal or community needs that are met are not enough to make a significant impact with getting the job done. There are times when it is necessary to incorporate complex interactions that interrelate with diverse components of the problem.

Defining five of Forrester’s points with some Biblical examples of each

“System Thinking” involves getting to the root of a system problem and then finding ways to correct and control the situation at hand.

⁶⁸ Hall, Douglas A. 2011. *Christian Applications To Systems Thinking*. D.Min. Class Handout Notes, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary/CUME, Boston, MA. Jan., 4.

⁶⁹ Hall, *Christian Applications To Systems Thinking: Jay Forrester*. D.Min. Class Handout Notes, 107.

⁷⁰ Hall, *Christian Applications To Systems Thinking: Jay Forrester*. D.Min. Class Handout Notes, 4.

1. *Resistance to Policy Changes* – Involves difficulty with influencing the outcome of what will take place. Every organization or church have a set of rules or bylaws that is in place to provide structure, guidelines and boundaries. Sometimes as these rules are implemented to establish a change within the organization workers resist the new conditions of change.
2. *Control Through Influence Points* – There is a possibility that this complex system can be influenced. Complex systems are vulnerable to a high sensitivity to the change in a few parameters and reveal the sensitive nature to the behaviors that result. According to Forrester's concepts we learn that complex systems can be controlled or manipulated through leverage points.
3. *Corrective Programs Counteracted by the System* – Systems with hierarchical dictatorship structure “top-down” programs are not ideal for influencing the behavior of others. People will always find a way to circumvent, manipulate and alter the parameters of the system to suit their individual needs.
4. *Long-Term Versus Short-Term Response* – Some programs that are aided by the Short-Term quick fix approach turn out to be as devastating in the Long-Term Response. The Short-Term Response fosters immediate gratification or quick results that are usually not permanent. The Short-Term Responses appear to “sugar-coat” or mask the situation on the surface whereby it is later determined that the problems continue to exist in a worse climate than they began.
5. *Drift to Low Performance* – Starting out with great enthusiasm and then losing steam. The changes that are implemented for improvement work for the benefit of the system for a limited period of time, but as time continues the change becomes an

exhaustive temporary fix to the situation and begins to diminish the goals and expectation of the system. “The pursuits of goals sometimes fall short of reaching their mark because of discouragement or some other pressure”⁷¹

Here I will share some biblical examples of the five points in Forrester’s Complex System. This relates to the five points that were defined earlier in this text.

1. *Resistance to Policy Change* – Originally the Apostle Paul was resistant to the teachings of Christianity. Paul at one time was totally devoted to the Sanhedrin and the teachings of Judaism. The Apostle Paul reached a turning point in his life when the anointing of the Lord fell upon him and converted him into Christianity. The scriptures say: *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Cor 1: 18).*
2. *Control Through Influence Points* – This point reminds me about the parable of the mustard seed. In the Book of Matthew the scriptures says: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches” (Mat 13:31).* A good seed that is planted will produce a good harvest.
3. *Corrective Programs Counteracted by the System* – The Pharisee’s believed in both the oral and written Torah. The Pharisee’s strongly believed in placing the Word of God before everything that they did and they also emphasized great importance in washing before all meals. However, the Pharisee’s were more ritualistic than they realized. There were moments when their ritualistic behavior overshadowed the love of God’s will for mankind. As a result of the Pharisee’s flawed behavior of being

⁷¹ Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 41.

more concerned with outward appearances of inanimate objects they in turn projected condemnation to the people instead of love. The Pharisee's believed that they were to become the dominant religious sect, but their conceited attitude changed the outcome of their religious goals.

The scriptures say: *"Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey---whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to righteousness"* (Romans 6: 15-18). In the Book of Matthew, Jesus says to the authorities known as the Pharisee's *"Because of your traditions, you make void the word of God"* (Matt. 15:6).

4. *Long-Term Versus Short-Term Response* – Reminds me of the story about the fish. If you give a person a fish they will be satisfied for the day, but if you teach a person to fish they can be satisfied for life and not dependent upon others to provide for them. Another fish story that comes to mind is revealed in the Book of Jonah. The scriptures say that: *"The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights"* (Jonah 1: 17). And the scriptures further say: *"from inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry"* (Jonah 2:1-2). The Lord directed Jonah to go to Nineveh. Instead in Jonah's disobedience to the Lord he set out to flee to Tarsish to escape the Lord. Fleeing the Lord as Jonah's short-term response to the situation. The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea that developed a storm that startled the men aboard the boat as it began to break apart. The men began praying to their gods when it was suspected that Jonah had brought the storm upon them. Jonah

requested that the crew in the boat throw him into the sea so that storm would become calm. So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea and the storm stopped raging. After being swallowed by the whale and in its stomach for three days Jonah sought the Lord through prayer. The long-term response for Jonah is that if he had been obedient to the Lord in the beginning and not fleeing, he would have received the Lord's blessings a lot sooner.

5. *Drift to Low Performance* – This concept reminds me of the Book of Luke when “Jesus Calms the Storm.” The scriptures say: “One day Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Let’s go over to the other side of the lake’ (Lk 8:22). So they got into the boat and set out (Lk 8:23). As they sailed, Jesus fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger (Lk 8:24). The disciples went and woke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master we’re going to drown!’ He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided and all was calm (Lk 8:25). Where is your faith? He asked His disciples” (Luke 8: 22-25, NIV). This passage has revealed to me that due to the disciple’s lack of faith they set aside the anointing of the Lord when they drifted to a low performance of faith.

Upon providing consideration to another question: *How might we be affected by Complex Systems?*

We are affected by “complex systems” mainly because of the volatile parameter and changes that are constantly introduced into our world or social existence. In this urban society one is bombarded with a mirage of complex systems that range from social, economic, physical, emotional, psychological, combined with poverty and violence, etc. In this complex system of life and living we are exposed to many who are

broken. The impact of a broken society is a complex system to repair. We begin to repair this complex system by adding one link at a time until the chain is long enough to connect together. We will continuously maintain a relationship with many diverse complex systems. We must find innovative methods for embracing complex systems and not be intimidated by the challenge that it projects.

How can we change the complexity of these systems?

I believe that we can change the complexity of these systems by acclimating ourselves to the environment that we are exposed to, then emerge into a forum of inquisitive networkers. Theoretically this all sounds great. However, it would take a lot more individual and corporate interaction to take place just to arrive at the door of any complex system. Some of the driving forces that are entwined in complex systems involve attitude, behavior, adaptability and functional-ability.

Attitude – will play an enormous part in how one will proceed and succeed from one point or level in the complex system to another.

Behavior – should incorporate integrity, knowledge and a desire in achieving goals.

Adaptability – involves the process of being able to step out of your comfort zone or norm and be reticent to adapt to changes whatever they might be.

Functional-ability – requires that one is able to function and maintain their composure at a beneficial level regardless of the stresses that the complex system generates. Being able to function under pressure while achieving goals and objectives with success is a positive attribute in dealing with any complex system.

Finally, I have come to realize that “*System Thinking*” provides a broader dimension into complex systems and how we approach our thought processes in life, developing ministries and organizations. System thinking and complex systems opens the door into an alternative approach in measuring what is beyond the surface of our basic understanding of how complex systems operate. Complex systems can help to modify, fine-tune and provide growth in all that we seek to accomplish as a community, society and church.

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization, Peter M. Senge.

Peter Senge takes the reader on a journey in understanding organizations and how systems thinking can significantly impact the ways we incorporate the thought process and structuring organizations. “Systems thinking” is a way to view how we organize thoughts and systems. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* by Peter Senge sums up and confirms the view of “systems thinking” as a learning puzzle of sorts. Senge says: “Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots.’ It is also a set of specific tools and techniques, originating in two threads: in ‘feedback’ concepts of cybernetics and in ‘servo-mechanism’ engineering theory dating back to the nineteenth century. During the last thirty years, these tools have been applied to help us understand a wide range of corporate, urban, regional, economic, political, ecological, and even physiological systems.”⁷² “The basic disciplines of system thinking consist of personal mastery,

⁷² Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (United States: Doubleday Publishers, 2006), 68-69.

mental models, team learning and shared vision.”⁷³ Peter Senge is a long time admirer of Dr. W. Edwards Deming who is considered a pioneer in the quality management revolution. As Peter Senge was completing his manuscript for the Fifth Discipline he sought to write inspiring comments about Dr. Deming in his book but he had never met Dr. Deming. Peter Senge thought it would be unlikely that Dr. Deming would consider paying any attention to his manuscript, but much to his surprise Dr. Deming after reading a copy of his manuscript sent him a letter, which took his breath away from the excitement.

Peter Senge introduces the foundational significance of the five disciplines and how they are representative of three “Core Learning Capabilities For Teams”: *Fostering Aspiration* (personal mastery, shared vision), *Developing Reflective Conversation* (mental models, dialogue), and *Understanding Complexity* (systems thinking).⁷⁴ Senge shares some insight into the following learning capabilities. The important things he says about *Systems Thinking* is that as we are engaged in business systems we tend to look towards “snapshots of isolated parts of the system. These systems consist of unseen matter of interrelated actions. Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively.”⁷⁵ Systems thinking is the discipline that support and interconnects all the other disciplines together. Systems thinking force organizations to place these disciplines into action if they seek to achieve

⁷³ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 16.

⁷⁴ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, xii-xiii.

⁷⁵ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 7.

a more sustainable outcome and reach the goals of their organization.

Personal Mastery is one of the most important components of the learning organization because the dependence on the capacity for learning should not supersede its members. When people begin their careers at an early age they tend to be highly motivated to perform to the best of their abilities for the organization, but as time continues through the years very few people operate at their peak level while others tend to slow down, lose commitment, sense of mission and excitement. Senge describes *personal mastery* as “the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening of our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively.”⁷⁶

Mental Models, here Senge points out that they are deep rooted assumptions, generalizations, pictures or images that influence the way we understand the world and what causes one to take action. In a nutshell, mental models appear to be one’s perception or preconceived notions of others.

These preconceived notions tend to contain some degree of biases within us. This is not to say that these are negative biases; this only points out that our thought process is swayed somewhat based upon personality traits. Senge indicates that the “discipline of mental models starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny.

It also includes the ability to carry on “learningful” conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that

⁷⁶ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 7.

thinking open to the influence of others.”⁷⁷

Having a *Shared Vision* represents people corporately embracing and focusing their thoughts, views, actions and mission in the same direction for the benefit of the organization/purpose. Senge describes “*shared vision*” as involving the skills to unearth the “shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance. In mastering this discipline, leaders learn the counterproductiveness of trying to dictate a vision.”⁷⁸

Team Learning begins with dialog where the team is thinking collectively. Team learning is dependent upon teams working together as the foundational learning unit in modern organizations...The discipline of team learning as a life long learner involves “a body of theory and techniques that must be studied and mastered to be put into practice.”⁷⁹

Organizations & Learning Disabilities

Many companies and organizations get off to an enthusiastic start when they form their business. There are some companies that succeed far beyond their expectations. Yet, there are other companies or organizations that crash and burn before their fifth year of doing business. Crash and burn in a company presents a sense of failure for the company where the efforts of reaching their goal of success are thwarted by some unforeseen business flaw. When business goals are not being met, we need to find out why? As you think about the *why*, it releases the opportunity to explore alternatives that can correct the circumstances. Perhaps if one were to apply the five

⁷⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 8-9.

⁷⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 9.

⁷⁹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 10.

disciplines to improve a failed organization or company, would this be enough to revive the company and get it back on its feet running again.

Senge, questions the learning ability of some successful companies that survive and never measure up to their potential He asks, “What if they are poor learners?” For the company and the individual poor practices and learning amounts to a learning disability. Often these learning disabilities exist for many years and go unnoticed. However, when learning disabilities are discovered you must learn how to fix the problem. Senge provides his readers with some hope and a cure. He believes “the five disciplines of the learning organization can act as antidotes to the learning disabilities” that are viewed more clearly.⁸⁰

A Shift Of Mind

Senge, takes his readers into the world of a new beginning a new creation of sorts when he brings *systems thinking* into the now and future. He provides a shift in how we view systems thinking from a different perspective. “We need systems thinking because our world is becoming exhausted with complexities.”⁸¹

Complexities hinder and alter the manner that we think. Complexities are barriers or obstacles that get in our way and block us from making progress. There are moments one might feel hopeless or that a task is too difficult to achieve and there is nothing that you can do. Hopelessness is one of the worst feelings when one is faced with disappointment. However, Senge has a cure for helplessness by using and seeing system thinking discipline as a way to enter the “age of interdependence” while systems

⁸⁰ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 26.

⁸¹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 68-69.

thinking is a way for seeing “structures” that underline complex situations, and discerning high from low leverage change... Without systems thinking, there is not an incentive or means to integrate the learning disciplines once they have come into practice.⁸² “Systems thinking” has shown me that there are alternative ways of overcoming obstacles, managing organizational goals and setting new personal and organizational achievements, if we apply the appropriate disciplines to the need at hand.

2. Prisoners

Prisoners in the Bible, Zach Sewell, 2012.

Since the beginning of time citizens within our society have been accused of a crime, arrested and placed into prison; the same social circumstances continue today. This section in the literature will shed some light on prisoners, their experience, and thoughts.

This book shares several stories of prisoners in the Bible and how God expresses His love and grace. Even in a dark place like prison Jesus Christ is always there to provide hope and change lives. This book serves as a resource to help inmates and ex-offenders understand the connection that God has with them even though they have fallen. This book reveals that God does not leave you even in your darkest hour. The loving and redemptive spirit of God is at work in each and every one of us. God has the power to change lives, but you must have faith and seek Him daily.

One can only imagine the difficulties from the degree of brokenness that prison brings to one’s life. Prison life is a hard and challenging experience where there is no escape for a period of time. Prison society and its harsh realities of survival force one to adapt to a culture far beyond their wildest dreams. Prison changes the way one thinks

⁸² Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 69.

and acts. For some, the prison experience makes them hard in character, while some others are humbled by the presence of God entering their life. Regardless of the challenges that we face in this life we must look toward a higher power and authority in God Almighty to be our provider, guide, healer and savior.

As I engage in this book, I am drawn into the author's awareness of the love of God for all people. Zach Sewell directs us to the Savior and lets us know that He loves even in our brokenness. Those who are in prison find difficulties in the environment of prison life and feel an array of emotions that are related to sadness, brokenness, anger, failure, disappointment and being alone, abandoned, afraid and unloved. The one thing that we all have on our side regardless of our circumstances is God.

The Bible teaches us that the Lord will always be with us even in times of trouble; as the Lord said to Joshua before He sent him to cross the Jordan River, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you,*" (Joshua 1:5, NIV). The Jordan River was a place that Joshua was unfamiliar with and it made him uncomfortable, but he was obedient to the Lord and was encouraged by His word and direction. There are moments in our life where we end up in uncomfortable circumstances, but we must seek the counsel of the Lord to provide direction. Even though one's life becomes changed because of prison, you should not feel alone because "God has worked in the lives of the imprisoned and will continue to do so."⁸³

Zach Sewell lets his readers know that regardless of how severe your legal or criminal circumstances are, God still has a purpose for your life. God is able to use anyone and "God is able to accomplish great things through anyone who is willing to

⁸³ Zach Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012), xiii.

serve Him—even people who have committed a crime as serious as murder...Even after Moses committed murder and was on the run for forty years, God chose Moses to lead the people (Israelites) out of slavery.”⁸⁴

Despite the crime that one is accused of, God has a way of getting in touch with us. Zach Sewell shares how God equips us. We all have some sort of baggage in our life from our past, and sooner or later things have a way of being revealed at the most inopportune time. The people around you might not know all or any of the details of your past, whether it be embarrassing or much worse, but God sees and know all things. Even Moses with all of his baggage was still used by God to be a leader. God likes using people with all of their flaws and teaches us how to improve our lives and learn how to be obedient servants of the Lord. The author, Zach Sewell shares a quote that he heard from a preacher that said: “with God’s help, people can turn their stumbling blocks into stepping stones.”⁸⁵

Finding God in Prison

The author tells his readers about a man named Manasseh who practiced and engaged in many evil things of this world, as well as murdering his own children. Manasseh was filled with the wickedness of witchcraft and performed many horrible sacrifices. However, eventually Manasseh was arrested and put in prison for his evil deeds. God gave Manasseh many opportunities to change his ways, but he ignored God. While in prison Manasseh, became distressed in his life and sought the Lord God. As Manasseh began to pray to God from the depths of his soul, it was then through God’s

⁸⁴ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 17.

⁸⁵ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 20.

favor that he realized that the Lord is God.”⁸⁶ Manasseh has now found God while imprisoned.

Listening for God’s Voice

The author points out three spiritual lessons to consider: “1) listen closely for God’s voice in our lives, 2) In finding God; he (Manasseh) reached out to God through prayer and God listened, and 3) God becomes so moved by our prayers that He shows His compassion and intimacy with us. God hears and answers our prayers”⁸⁷ We serve a loving, compassionate and forgiving God.

Real Trust In God

The author shares a story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that is described in the book of Daniel 3:1-6. Here an illustration was given to show their faith and trust in God. When the Babylonian forces and King Nebuchadnezzar arrested them for not worshiping a gold image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace. The Holy hand of God protected them because of their unwavering trust in God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego “truly believed that the power of God would help them through their situation.”⁸⁸ The story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is not far from the life challenging situations that many face everyday. That fiery furnace could be a financial, family or legal situation, but whatever might be the outcome is determined by your trust in God.

Trading In Your Prison Clothes

⁸⁶ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 33.

⁸⁷ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 33-34.

⁸⁸ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 47.

This chapter in the book talks about a wicked King of Judah named Jehoiachin who was imprisoned for 37 years. Upon his release he traded in his prison clothes for a new lifestyle. The author suggests that there is something that we all can trade in or let go in an effort to be more Christ-like. He says that we can benefit more in our life and establish a better relationship with God and others if we cast out our ungodly attributes that we hold so close.”⁸⁹

Sometimes in life our old ways become contributing factors that hinder our progress. The way to evaluate your progress is to conduct a self-assessment test. You should determine what is working in your life and what is not working and then make the necessary adjustments. The more one focuses on God’s ways the more you will hear His voice. One passage in this book tells how “God spoke to the people through the prophet Hagi and said, ‘Give careful thought to your ways’ (Hagi 1:5)... If we are too self-focused, our actions will affect other people and we may not even realize it.”⁹⁰

Everyone should give thought to what you will trade in; the author asks that you “go to the root issue that has led to the troubling circumstances in your life. And for the prisoner or ex-offender there is a much deeper issue that has led to your criminal behavior and you have to find a way to address those issues...Many people return to prison after there’re released because they return to their previous lifestyle.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 126.

⁹⁰ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 127.

⁹¹ Sewell, *Prisoners In The Bible*, 128.

The Prisoner In The Third Cell, Gene Edwards, 1992.

This book shares a perspective on prisoners who have been caught up in circumstances that they do not understand. The book reflects on the struggles that John the Baptist had with the Lord as he awaited his execution.

The evil King Herod set out to destroy Christians and first born babies. Many people had to immediately flee to the desert to escape the grasp of Herod's evilness. The people who fled to the desert began to return to their previous homeland when it was safe. Perhaps Zachariah and Elizabeth fled to the desert with their son John. A traditional story is that later Zachariah passed on to be with God and a short period of time passed when Elizabeth passed on, leaving John to be orphaned. Thus, John grew up learning the Nazarite culture and the Hebrew language. It is sad that John had several offers from families that wanted to adopt him, but he chose to return to the wilderness of the desert and live there. John believed that God would provide and take care of him. John spent most of his time praying and fasting in the desert. John devoted every aspect of his life to God. One thing about John is that he always listened for the voice of God to give him direction in his life. Part of the story is that one day while John was standing on a cliff gazing at the sunset a heavenly voice came upon him and said, "*John, the fullness of time has come. What you have lived your entire life for is at hand. Go. Proclaim the Day of the Lord. Pull down the mountains; fill in the valleys; prepare a highway for the Messiah. Go, John, now. Look neither to the right nor the left. Let there be nothing else in your life. No one has ever carried so great a responsibility as do you at this hour. Proclaim the coming of the Lord!*"⁹²

⁹² Gene Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell* (Auburn, ME: Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 1991), 19.

During John's ministry he began proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, urging people to repent and baptizing followers in the Jordan River. It would be later in John's ministry that he would challenge the arrogance and the unjust ways of religious authorities. As the authorities appeared before John as he was preparing to speak before the crowd; John called out the religious authorities and told them how he felt about them. The authorities did not hesitate in retreating into their carriages and leaving the area. Now, John has gathered more support from his followers and a great number of people from the crowd decided to be baptized.⁹³

Later John would challenge the immorality of the marriage of Herod and Herodias. John denounced Herod's marriage to his half brother's wife Herodias. Herodias became angry and ordered John to be arrested. The order was carried out and John was sent to prison placed in a cell until Herod decided what to do with him.⁹⁴

Prisoners and guards who were in close proximity to John's cell realized that he was there and expressed their discontentment of Herod arresting John. Some began to question the devotion that John has for God and now he is in prison... The "prisoner in the first cell" blames man for everything, the "prisoner in the second cell" blames God, while the "prisoner in the third cell" (John) remains silent.⁹⁵ Regardless of the outcome of our circumstances we must continue to remain faithful to God.

Meanwhile, Herod was entertaining some guests and his wife's daughter "Salome" had just finished dancing for the guest and Herod granted her a wish for

⁹³ Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell*, 31.

⁹⁴ Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell*, 40.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell*, 45-46.

whatever she wanted. Salome wished for John the Baptist's head be brought to the banquet room on a platter.⁹⁶ The order was carried out and John the Baptist was beheaded. Throughout John's life he remained a devout servant of the Lord. John was faced with the injustices and the wickedness of evil people. This book leaves the readers with the question of whether "*you will continue to follow this God who did not live up to your expectations?*"⁹⁷

God Behind Bars: Prison Fellowship, John Perry, 2006.

Author John Perry shares a testimony about Mr. Charles Colson. Mr. Charles Colson, who wrote the forward is one of the subjects in the book. Mr. Colson spent seven years in prison following the Watergate scandal. This is important for this thesis-project because it reveals that God is always with us even in our distress. God had a plan when He called Mr. Colson back to the prison, not as a prisoner, but as a minister who would minister to the inmates.

In the first chapter called "*Broken Vessels*" the author shares his insights regarding prison and says: "Prison destroys many people. It breaks prisoners both innocent and guilty, dangerous and harmless; their spouses and children, who endure physical loss, cultural rejection, and often financial collapse."⁹⁸

While Charles Colson was working under President Nixon's administration he possessed a firm attitude of being "tough on crime, favoring harsh sentencing and limits

⁹⁶ Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell*, 68.

⁹⁷ Edwards, *The Prisoner In The Third Cell*, 78.

⁹⁸ John Perry, *God Behind Bars: Prison Fellowship* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2006.), 1.

on parole to get lawbreakers off the streets for good...On one occasion Colson would gesture out of the Oval Office window ‘Our people out there have had enough of being soft on criminals,’ he says.”⁹⁹

Now, Colson on the other side of the law himself learned that the criminal justice system was not soft after all. While in prison in 1974 Colson learned there were approximately “two hundred thousand inmates in America’s state and federal prisons and 94 percent are male who are greatly ignored or forgotten about by society.”¹⁰⁰ The author stresses a very valid point that society and the criminal justice system might want to consider: “The things that occur to inmates in prison is important to everyone because the way they were treated on the inside of prison affects their behavior on the outside...one day we will be sharing the same employer, the same neighborhood, and even the same apartment building with an ex-offender.”¹⁰¹

Prisoners have a lot of time on their hands while they are incarcerated and during that time they learn new things from other prisoners and sharpen their skills. Those prisoners who make it back to prison find ways to increase their network of other inmates as they become comfortably familiar with the system. We have a flawed criminal justice system that has been in place for so long that it is outdated. Today, many community leaders are calling for criminal justice reform to address the sentencing requirements, prison population overcrowding, and to reduce punishment for non-violent crimes. Another reason for seeing our current criminal justice system as a broken

⁹⁹ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 3.

entity emerges when one looks at the staggering number of inmates; it leaves one wondering, What is the system doing to rehabilitate prisoners into ex-offenders?

Charles Colson took a negative situation in his life and turned it into a positive for others. While in prison, Charles Colson began brainstorming about the idea of prison reform. He spent thirty years developing a new perspective on prison and prisoner reform and founded an organization called “Prison Fellowship Ministries,” was developed to take on the challenge of reshaping society’s thought process about prisons, punishment, rehabilitation, restitution, justice, and the causes of crime.”¹⁰² One of the things that Colson says about rehabilitation is: “rehabilitating a criminal is impossible if the criminal does not want to change... The only way to reshape an offender’s behavior pattern for good, is not to impose changes from the outside, but to kindle the desire to change from within.”¹⁰³

God Behind Bars

In Colson’s pursuit in ministering to Christian and non-Christian inmates, with the permission of the warden, he gathered his team of workers, Christian leaders and began his outreach ministry. The Prison Fellowship Ministry would minister to the inmates through a volunteer led study group, support with logistics and a follow-up process to monitor the participants’ progress. Colson appeared at the Atlanta prison to hold a seminar with the inmates. Prior to going to speak he was cautioned by an “unofficial leader of the Christian group, not to preach or talk about Jesus to the inmates because the men would not stand for it, no religion. Now, Colson is nervous and

¹⁰² Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 6.

¹⁰³ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 7.

swimming in sweat while scrambling to find something to talk to the inmates about. As Colson walked out before the inmates, he discarded his notes on criminal justice reform and decided to speak about what God put on his heart, which was Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ By the time Colson had finished speaking to the inmates, they were left with the Holy Spirit touching their souls as they clapped, cheered and wept. God was behind bars touching the hearts of the men as some repented and turned their lives over to Christ. Colson mentions that the prison reform that most people are expecting does not begin at the hands of the prison system, instead “Change and reform begins with changed hearts.”¹⁰⁵

Prison life for many on the outside is an unimaginable experience. The reality that we come to know is that “prisons are dangerous places—and there exist a concern in placing nonviolent offenders in a cellblock with rapists and murderers...to sentence them with dangerous criminals represents cruel and unusual punishment. God will hold us accountable for it says Colson.”¹⁰⁶

Crime and Justice

The centuries old issue of crime has been around since the beginning of time when Eve took the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden. When a crime has been committed or when one has been accused of a crime, society seeks some measure of punishment or justice upon the accused. What we have learned since Biblical times is that there are moments where a legal system which is expected to administer some form

¹⁰⁴ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 77-78.

¹⁰⁵ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 79.

¹⁰⁶ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 84.

of justice, turns out to be unjust in its imposition upon others who may be innocent or not.

The initiative of the Prison Fellowship Ministry began as a support system “to encourage Christian prisoners in their faith and to provide them with the necessary tools to share the gospel with others behind bars.”¹⁰⁷ In order to accomplish this support system ministry the prisoners must be in the right frame of mind and spirit. A fair and just manner of treatment that a prisoner receives is very critical to their personal and spiritual growth. Colson says “helping inmates find God behind bars is fully effective as their lives are being redirected so long as the stigma of being considered unredeemable misfits is not hovering over them with every move they make in life... The Prison Fellowship Ministry looked at sentencing and incarceration issues to see why people became criminals and what Christian teaching could do about it.”¹⁰⁸

At some point society and the criminal justice system cannot lock up everyone who is accused of a crime and throw away the keys. There will come a time when a prisoner is released because not all crimes carry a life sentence. Prisoners and ex-offenders are a part of our community and society. So there need to be some sort of adjustments to our justice system. If we are anticipating ex-offenders to live among our free society then it would be most advantageous to mold them into Christian law abiding citizens. Society must come to the “realization that you can’t preach to prisoners without addressing justice.”¹⁰⁹ A transformation in our society, our criminal justice system and

¹⁰⁷ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 124.

¹⁰⁹ Perry, *God Behind Bars*, 125.

our Christian mission needs to occur in an effort to minister to prisoners and ex-offenders. The transforming nature of the gospel must emerge within the lives of Christians, the criminal justice system and society.

Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out, Lennie Spitale, 2002.

This book opens a door to understanding the prison culture and it reveals how the ex-offender is essential to prison ministry. This book will provide some tools for equipping individuals and churches with an effective prison ministry approach.

Feelings: The Big Hurt

In my exploration into this book I begin to understand what the experience of one entering the prison system feels like. The author places the reader in an empathetic mindset in order to grasp the moment-by-moment encounters that prisoners face. This new inmate had been in the county jail several times and the experience was not a major concern for him because he knew there was some hope of being released in a short period of time. But, as this inmate entered what he calls “The Big House” a state prison things seemed more intimidating to him. The echoing sounds of his footsteps and the slamming of metal doors of the cellblocks began to be an alarming feeling.

As the new arrivals are then processed into the prison facility, they are provided with their denim jeans and shirt. Then they are deloused in a shower and sent to a six-by-nine foot cell.”¹¹⁰ Now, the reality of prison life was beginning set in motion and the pain and sadness starts to settle in. The inmate experiences an emotional moment of

¹¹⁰ Lennie Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002.), 4.

feeling “trapped and caged like an animal...The inmate’s pain is most felt realizing that he is lacking his freedom.”¹¹¹

Inmates go through a number of emotional hurts and pain while they are incarcerated. Some of their hurts and emotional pain stems from feeling a sense of isolation, separation from family members and significant others. We see that “the hardship of prison life is in not being able to go to the ones you love when you want to go to them.”¹¹² In an effort for the inmate to emotionally survive some of their thoughts of not being able to have access with loved ones, some tend to shut their emotions down to minimize their pain. Some “convince themselves that they don’t care, then it wouldn’t hurt as much...he/she trains themselves never to become attached to anyone on a deep level.”¹¹³

The one thing that will make a significant impact with inmates is the involvement of Christian practitioners, Christian leaders, volunteers and correctional systems networking together to provide a Christian influence in the lives of inmates. We arrive at that place when we are committed to serving God by spreading the gospel in our efforts in ministering to inmates and ex-offenders. With taking on this challenge practitioners and leaders must be sensitive to the emotional dilemmas of the inmate. In understanding the inmate “volunteers need to be aware of the dull ache that many inmates carry around with them—due to their longing to be with that special someone...The ache is a part of the fabric of prison life. One key thing for volunteers is

¹¹¹ Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 5.

¹¹² Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 7.

¹¹³ Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 9.

to be compassionate toward the inmate.”¹¹⁴ Lonely pain is the “Big Hurt” for most inmates.

The Spiritual Climate of Prisons and jails

Within the prison walls there are many who find themselves seeking and finding Christ in their lives. The volunteers who minister to the inmates are planting the seed of the gospel in the fertile ground of their hearts. As volunteers and practitioners we enter the prisons to teach the gospel to as many inmates as we can, who are broken in their spirit and in some way hungry to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives.

Although the inmates are not physically free, the free-will that God has blessed them with allows them to engage in a relationship of knowing God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This relationship reminds me of a scripture as one is seeking God, “*O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*” (Ps 34:8, NASB).

The majority of inmates know that something they have done wrong landed them in prison, but volunteers must reassure them that “God in His great mercy and compassion, has slowed them down long enough to consider the claims of the gospel and has put them in a gracious state to receive it!... The gospel in prison carries a missionary flavor that crosses many ethnic and cultural divides.”¹¹⁵ The gospel of the Lord extends to all the people of His creation and to anyone who chooses to hear His words and receive Him in Christ. The gospel does not discriminate from one ethnic

¹¹⁴ Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 10.

¹¹⁵ Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 191.

culture to another. The gospel is here for anyone who wishes the partake in the richness of its blessing.

One benefit of prison Bible study is that it opens a door for the inmate who has not known Christ before. Bible study creates a dialog of inquisitive thought about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bible Study brings forth a method of getting to know the Lord in a less intimidating way. The author associates prison ministry with the Book of Acts...Every trip to prison is etched in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. God uses these ‘houses of mourning’ (see Eccles. 7:2) to bring rebellious people to the end of themselves by allowing them to experience their own brokenness and their own inability to make their lives work. He humbles them and slows them down long enough to consider His answer for their lives—the forgiveness of their sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ at the cross.”¹¹⁶ The author in this prison ministry brings to light the culture and inmate encounters while serving their prison sentences. The book also reveals the love and presence of God touching their lives and leading them to Christ through their own spiritual encounters.

The Principles Of Prison Ministry, Dr. Tommy Seay Jr.

This book serves as a manual that will assist outreach teams, ministries, volunteers, chaplains with navigating and understanding what prison ministry involves. This book serves as a practical and spiritual guide for volunteers who are called to prison ministry.

In order to answer the difficult call of prison ministry one must know Jesus

¹¹⁶ Spitale, *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out*, 195.

Christ. Prison ministry is no easy task. As one enters the challenging “world of prisons, you will encounter spiritual warfare... Prison Ministry is direct hand to hand combat, with principalities, evil spiritual powers, rulers of the darkness of this world and wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).”¹¹⁷ After reading this word of caution for entering prison ministry, it would be fair to say that you better be prayed-up and ready. Prisons and Prison Ministry is nothing to take lightly. I am sure that volunteers and practitioners will see, hear or experience situations in prisons that they never would have imagined. Despite the intimidation factor of entering a prison, we have to answer the call of Jesus: When Jesus commanded us to ‘go into all the world’ that included prisons.

Prison Ministry forces the Christian volunteer to look beyond to harm that inmates have caused to innocent law abiding citizens when they were on the outside, yet through God’s grace “we must find a way to show them His love and forgiveness... God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind, 2 Tim. 1:7. We must enter prisons with the power of God’s love.”¹¹⁸

Prior to becoming a prison ministry volunteer the Department of Corrections within the selected state is required to conduct a background check on anyone entering the prison system as a Regular Volunteer or a Limited Volunteer. The background investigation most often will include “filling out an application package that will include an examination of your credentials and some states require a drug test and a TB test” prior to allowing access as a volunteer.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Dr. Tommy Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry* (Fairfax, VA: Xukon Press, 2002), 9.

¹¹⁸ Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry*, 13.

¹¹⁹ Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry*, 21.

How to Set Up a Service

Setting up a service should be a well thought out step-by-step plan before the volunteer enters the prison. The prison ministry plans should always “begin with the Word of God and continue the same way on your service visit. Not anyone is equipped to lead a prison ministry service. One must be commissioned by God through the Holy Spirit to take on a powerful ministry such as prison ministry. The second component in setting up a service requires that a well thought out written plan including strategy, the type of service that will take place and a divine purpose. This can be developed at the church or at home prior to meeting with the religious volunteer team. The home church is considered the headquarters of the prison ministry. The third important source in setting up the prison ministry is prayer. The power of ‘fervent prayer is imperative when you have a volunteer religious team in one of Satan’s strongholds (prison)... It would not be a bad idea to have members of the team to be anointed with oil on a regular basis.”¹²⁰ After house keeping there are things to consider when you meet with the group of inmates for service; one is to “introduce yourself and the team at beginning of the service, explain the type of service and thank the inmates with encouragement for coming to the service. Let the inmates know that the miracle of God has turned the place where the service is being held into a church, a place of worshiping God and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.”¹²¹ The inmates have gathered to have church and to hear the Word of God.

The author mentions that there are many inmates that are well versed in the

¹²⁰ Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry*, 39.

¹²¹ Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry*, 40.

scriptures, but the Department of Corrections Rules do not permit any inmate to conduct religious services even if they were ordained/licensed ministers or pastors prior to entering prison. An inmate with a ministerial license is permitted to assist the volunteer Minister in scripture reading, praying and singing songs.¹²² All volunteers must adhere to the prison rules because the prison officials must maintain order within prison walls. Prison Ministry is serious business for God and important for the inmates' spiritual growth and relationship with God.

Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward, W. Wilson Goode Sr., et al.

This book reveals how some families are impacted when a family member is imprisoned. There are many physical, financial and emotional adjustments to be made when a family member enters prison. This book will be helpful in understanding the many issues involving the repercussions and impact of incarceration.

The author introduces the enormous crisis that we are faced with today in America concerning our criminal justice system. Our communities and millions of people, predominately African American males, have succumbed to the grasp of the criminal justice system through incarceration. The disproportionate number of African Americans who are incarcerated today is jaw dropping. As a result of incarceration, families are left behind and greatly impacted physically and emotionally. Somewhere in all of this criminal justice and incarceration mess there must be a sense of hope out there. The author makes a plea to the American churches regarding this crisis and asks that they not ignore this call for ministering to the needs of incarcerated individuals and their families. God is calling for the churches across this nation to restore hope and His

¹²² Seay Jr., *The Principles Of Prison Ministry*, 91.

love into the lives of broken people.

Finding Hope in the Scriptures

The author opens the reader's mind to the idea of hope. Our hope in God is expected to resonate within everyone who trusts in the Lord. The omnipresence of God surrounds us every moment of the day and night wherever we are. It is in the hope of God that we are sustained, whatever the challenge might be, through our church and by the Holy Spirit, God is with us. We are reminded that "God's presence is being made manifest through the church in its ministries to and among those most affected by crime and incarceration."¹²³

The author recommends that churches open their doors by reaching out to the many who are "incarcerated, returning from incarceration, at risk for incarceration, and interaction with families of incarnated individuals... Churches and their congregations should administer the attention to prison ministry in the same manner that is administered to the sick and those who are hospitalized."¹²⁴ As Jesus called the disciples into His ministry, after He gave them instructions He commissioned them to go out and pray, teach, heal and meet the needs of suffering people. We also as Christen leaders are commissioned to venture out among the earth and meet the needs of the lowly ones, the sick and disadvantaged. Interacting and ministering to incarcerated individuals is not an easy task, but "we must learn how to interact with people behind bars. Develop ways of providing assistance to grieving parents of incarcerated individuals. We must also establish networking relationships with correctional, probation and parole officials as we

¹²³ W. Wilson Goode Sr. et al, *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward* (Valley Forge: Johnson Press, 2011), 4.

¹²⁴ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 4.

reveal the presence of God and the spreading of the gospel.”¹²⁵ It is so important for prison ministry volunteers to provide the necessary attention to support the needs of inmates and ex-offenders. As the ex-offender has been released from prison, he/she will experience a tough road to getting back on their feet, so support and ministry is very critical to their survival. Perhaps as inmates are transformed by the anointed spirit of Christ far before they are released, then maybe the recidivism rate would be much lower than it is today.

The Stain of Incarceration

The alarming number of African American males who have been incarcerated in this country has left a grim cloud over the African American communities. There are many communities in our nation that are labeled “high crime areas” and a training ground for potential new offenders. These communities lack the adequate support from the government to provide community resources and programs to the residents. The lack of government support to African American communities promotes an opportunity for criminal behavior to brew. One of the authors, *Charles E. Lewis Jr.*, reports that within the last four decades the prison and jail population has skyrocketed to alarming proportions. “Prior to 1970 incarcerated people in the U.S. federal and state prison system amounted to approximately 200,000. Now, some forty years later we are faced with a staggering number of 2.3 million residents of our federal and state prison system, with the United States as the leading landlord. These numbers amount to more than five times the worlds average.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 5.

¹²⁶ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 19.

The stain of incarceration impacts an inmate, his/her family, and the community at large in many ways. The author shares with the reader that there are health concerns for the inmate and family members. Prisons and jails are considered “incubators of infectious diseases that pose a danger to families and communities when an inmate is released from jail... with diseases that are described as hepatitis. C, HIV and TB are some of the widely pronounced infectious diseases within the prison system. Most of the people never receive treatment while they are incarcerated and when they are released others in their family or community become exposed and infected.”¹²⁷

The lack of education is a dilemma for the African American inmate and the ex-offender. The author reveals that: “poorly educated individuals are most likely to become incarcerated. A large number of inmates do not have a high school diploma or a GED certificate. A “1997 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics survey reported that approximately 44 percent of black males in prison are without a high school diploma or GED certificate.”¹²⁸ The absence of an education will hinder a person’s opportunity for employment once he is released. In the long run the lack of education, skills, and employment will trickle down to not earning enough to provide for one’s self or family. Studies have revealed “that a person having parents who are incarcerated places children at risk for antisocial behavior and mental health issues.”¹²⁹ The stain of incarceration reaches far beyond the incarceration of an individual. “Massive incarceration of African American males is hurting and crippling our economic health of our communities by

¹²⁷ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 20-21.

¹²⁸ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 21.

¹²⁹ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 22.

hindering the emotional and social support of black families and our local and global political process. Massive incarceration of African American males with felony convictions has denied them the right to vote.”¹³⁰

Prisons Are Big Business

For decades prisons in the U.S. have become a leading enterprise in the incarceration of predominantly African American males. Many of the “Tough-On-Crime” initiatives over the past four decades have employed and financially paved the way for the criminal justice system, which includes police, judges, lawyers, corrections, parole, and probation support. The taxpayers are funding a wide margin of the cost for the careers related to the criminal justice system as well as the housing of millions of inmates.¹³¹

What Can We Do?

After reading all of the information regarding the criminal justice system, the incarceration rate and its affect on family and community, the author shares some insights on what can be done to change the outcome of our community and the alarming number of incarcerated individuals in this country.

Now, more than ever the call is upon the churches to unite their efforts to dissolve the staggering numbers of the incarceration rate through prison reform. One notable thing that has been brought to light through the author is the “initiative of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative of the Progressive National Baptist Convention that shows interest in promoting healing in communities and aids those leaving prison and jails to

¹³⁰ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 23.

¹³¹ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 26.

reintegrate more effectively within the community... Only when churches come together on a large scale to meet this issue of mass incarceration head on will we see a significant change.”¹³²

Amachi: Mentoring the Children of Prisoners

The author W. Wilson Goode Sr. opens the reader’s eyes to the children of prisoners. The church’s prison ministry and mission should be extended far beyond the cell bars and walls of the prison. The church is called upon to do nurturing, protecting and guiding all children, but children of inmates are in greater need of support and mentoring. I have heard that “*an ounce of cure is better than an ounce of pain.*” With the high number of individuals who are incarcerated in this country we have to take into account that many of them have young children who are the beneficiaries of a parent’s incarceration.

Approximately “1.7 million children have parents who are incarcerated in federal or state prison.” These children are at-risk because of their family circumstances. They are vulnerable to poverty, violence, drugs, sexual encounters, human trafficking, limited educational opportunities that leave little hope for a positive future.”¹³³ The call for mentoring the children of incarcerated individuals is critical for their future development. We need to mentor these children to build positive traits that will teach them that there is hope and positive opportunities beyond their circumstances. The church is the ideal and most important institution to nurture and minister to the families of prisoners. The church is equipped to provide biblical, spiritual and moral guidance.

¹³² Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 27-28.

¹³³ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 66.

The church is the place of prayer, worship, forgiveness, grace and hope. With the diverse ministries that many urban church's have today, they can address many of the needs of people that they encounter.

Why Mentoring?

The families and children of prisoners are the silent suffering forgotten ones in this situation. The author W. Wilson Goode Sr. describes these children "as a specific group with special needs,"¹³⁴ and there is a shortage on knowledge regarding interventions that could greatly improve the prospects for their lives. These children are lacking the steady and reliable interaction from adults in their lives. Mentors can make an enormous difference and impact in people's lives. Mentors are significant because they can provide a firm and consistent adult care and support to young people in an effort to widely reduce a youth's introduction to violence, drugs and alcohol use. Mentors seek to improve a child's school performance and attendance. The Amachi project has adopted the phrase, People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise. The project is a partnership where multiple churches network together to mentor others. The objective of the project is to match children with a loving and caring adult where they meet for at least an hour or two per week.¹³⁵ Mentoring seeks to help children succeed in their lives despite the family and urban obstacles that they might encounter during their lifetime.

¹³⁴ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 69.

¹³⁵ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 69-70.

Breaking the Chain: Partnerships for Ministry to Children of Prisoners

In some circumstances there are generational ties to criminal behavior and incarceration. Part of the learning process for a child is to mimic what they see and hear and then display corresponding actions. The sensitive nature and innocence of children need to be protected as much as possible. Many of the lives of youth in this country have been lost to drugs, violence, gang activity and death. The author Deborah Jackson-Meyers says, “to save the children and youth of all the neighborhoods where our congregations are located, the church is obligated to respond to the problem of African American intergenerational incarceration. Ending the cycle of juvenile criminal behavior in African American families that is influenced by past criminal activities of their parents and grandparents. At birth children emerge into this world as precious innocent cuddly little beings until their lives become tainted and damaged by the negative influences, behaviors of this world and lifestyles around them.”¹³⁶

The Breaking the Chain Model

The author Jackson-Meyers leads the charge for the critical state of our youth. Our African American youth need to be rescued from the grip of criminal activity and criminal enterprise that is knocking on their door everyday. Our church “congregations are located in those neighborhoods where our youth and children need rescuing. An outreach organization called Breaking Chain Foundation (BTC) has extended their efforts to meet the spiritual, emotional, educational, and psychological needs of children and youth affected by the chains of intergenerational incarceration... We must end the

¹³⁶ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 75.

cycle of incarceration among our youth.”¹³⁷ It is sad to see many urban communities for decades have become complacent and conditioned to the struggles and hardships within their environment. The wrath of genocide is plaguing our African American urban communities and the saga continues for future decades with no reprieve.

“The Breaking the Chains Model is concentrated in the belief that children and youth who become exposed to powerful positive influences during early stages of their lives and taught empowering tools to break the cycle of destruction and deter them from negative intergenerational deviant behaviors that most likely leads to incarceration.”¹³⁸ The Breaking the Chain Model is a four-part intervention program that encompasses a *Mentoring Program, Sponsoring Program, Tutoring Program and Referral Program*. Within the *Mentoring Program* volunteer caring adults assist youth in a number of ways. The *Sponsoring Program* offers economic support to the youth with difficult circumstances. The *Tutoring Program* provides tutors to assist youth with reading and math skills, and the *Referral program* develops an assessment of each youth and provides referral services for youth that include, psychological counseling support, academic support, nutritional services, pastoral care and counseling, and recreational programs.¹³⁹ In “*Breaking the Chains*” we all must do our part in keeping hope alive for wellbeing of our youth and communities. In our urban “African American communities our churches hold a central position in this process... The black church is a visible

¹³⁷ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 75.

¹³⁸ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 76.

¹³⁹ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 79-80.

fellowship, an institution with great economic, social, political and spiritual influences.”¹⁴⁰

An Ounce of Prevention

Within this section, author Charles E. Lewis Jr. shares his thoughts on assisting newly released persons from prison or ex-offenders to “successfully reintegrate into society and avoid returning to prison... Perhaps a stronger focus on pre-entry strategies are necessary in helping youth avoid being initiated into the criminal justice system. These strategies are extremely important in reducing recidivism of the number of people who return to prison and jail after being released. The most effective way to reduce people from entering the criminal justice system is to prevent young people from getting involved in criminal activity in the first place.”¹⁴¹

Much has to change in the social and community efforts to address the prevention of youth exhibiting violent and dysfunctional behaviors that lead to their arrest. This issue affecting our youth is everyone’s problem that must be fixed by all. Correcting and guiding the lifestyles and behaviors of youth begins in the home and in the church. Children and youth have to be trained and guided in positive healthy traits that will allow them to make better decisions as they mature in life. The content of what youth watch on television, engage in video games and who they associate with makes a great difference in the finished product. The author expresses what we, the adults and churches, should be doing with our children and youth from a scriptural context, “Train a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it, (Proverbs

¹⁴⁰ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 80.

¹⁴¹ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 93.

22:6, KJV)... Children should be in Sunday school and engage in other constructive activities that will teach them the moral lessons that will keep them on the strait and narrow road to success.”¹⁴²

The Way Forward

Authors, W. Wilson Goode Sr., Charles E. Lewis Jr., and Harold Dean Trulear share in identifying the imperfections of our society and the world we live in. We are faced with individuals, systems, communities and governments that contribute to the many problems that our communities are face with today. The most alarming crisis that our society is faced with is the “disproportionate number of African American involvement in the criminal justice system. The involvement of African Americans in the CJS leaves millions of lives of families, children and inmates disrupted, damaged and permanently scarred. Now is the time for churches to step in and see what role it can play in reducing the rate of incarceration among African Americans.”¹⁴³

In all of this social crisis and chaos relating to incarceration, the church has a great task on its hands of introducing hope to people through God. The mission of the Christian church has always been charged with abolishing the suffering of people, preaching the good news, healing the brokenhearted, liberating people in captivity, and providing sight where there is none,” (Lk 4:18).¹⁴⁴ For over a century the African American culture has encountered one social, economic, educational and race crisis after another. The African American culture is resilient because despite all of the crisis and

¹⁴² Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 93-94.

¹⁴³ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 191.

¹⁴⁴ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 191.

hardships that they have endured over a century and for many decades, they continue to stand strong willing to press on and fight the challenges to overcome obstacles.

Let it be known that “two decades ago one of every four African American men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine was involved in the criminal justice system.”¹⁴⁵ We know that the African Americans who become captured in the web of the criminal justice system are more prone to become substance abusers, struggle’s with mental health issues, high school dropouts with poor labor market skills, residents of poor neighborhoods plagued with crime and drugs... And the children most prone to becoming at-risk for getting involved in the criminal justice system are black and poor, children of incarcerated individuals, academically deficient, children in foster care, and children with psychological, emotional and behavior problems.

Today our fight against the alarming incarceration rate in this country is the civil rights struggle of this century.”¹⁴⁶ As we continue to press forward in addressing this crisis, the church is the institution and spirit of hope that will convey God’s love, hope, grace and healing to all of the suffering people of this world.

3. Ex-offenders

Equipping Your Church to Minister to Ex-Offenders, Jones, Louis N. 2000.

This book explores the needs and goals of the Ex-Offender. An interpretation of Ex-Offenders is exposed. There is a preparation process that should be considered before beginning an Ex-Offender Ministry. There are personal and spiritual boundaries that must be enforced before the ex-offender commits to joining the Ex-offender Ministry. A part of the ministry is expected to welcome and nurture the Ex-Offender

¹⁴⁵ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 192.

¹⁴⁶ Goode Sr. et al., *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*, 192.

into discipleship and ministry. There are legal aspects in ministering to Ex-offender Ministry that the church must be aware of because of potential liability issues. Any ministry must develop safe environments for everyone. The church must consider numerous aspects of an Ex-offender Ministry before getting started with the ministry.

The Need

As followers of Christ the church and we, its members, Christian practitioners are obligated to do the work of the Lord as we are called to minister to the many people who need support and encouragement. Churches and ministries are tasked in meeting various needs of the people in and outside of the church. Today many churches are getting involved with ministering to the ex-offender and his/her needs. In equipping our churches to meet the needs of the ex-offender, we must understand what their needs are and help them reach their specific goals.

The author mentions the experience of one ex-offender: “being released from prison he felt intimidated because it was a new and frightening experience for him; a sense of feeling lost. One of the ex-offenders biggest fear and causes of recidivism is the abrupt transition back into society, because sometimes the ex-offender experiences pressures of anxiety, low self-esteem, failure and hopelessness.”¹⁴⁷

In taking on the challenge of ministering to ex-offenders one must be sensitive to the dialog that is communicated or the manner that is used to identify ex-offenders. The authors manual he describes the ex-offender “as persons, juveniles, or adults who have broken federal, state, county or city ordinances, and convicted, then sent to jail or prison. The distinction is made between ex-prisoner vs. ex-offender. The ex-prisoner is a person

¹⁴⁷ Louis N. Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders* (Washington, D.C.: Conquest Books, Conquest House, Inc., 2000.), 1.

who would repeatedly return to prison, while the ex-offender is someone who has put criminal offenses and behavior behind him and is prepared to begin a new life.”¹⁴⁸ There is a slightly greater effort being made in assisting the inmate in prisons through prison ministry initiatives compared to the few ex-offender efforts on the outside. However, today many churches and organizations are beginning to recognize that there is a need for ex-offender ministry. As Christians begin to engage in support for the ex-offender, we are reminded: “The gospel of Jesus Christ calls the church to respond to those who are downcast and afflicted, which includes ex-offenders.”¹⁴⁹

The Goal of Ex-offender Ministry

One goal of the ex-offender ministry is to minister to others while meeting their needs. The goal of the ministry should reach far beyond the anticipated achievements of man... And through the power of God a change can occur in the hearts and lives of men and women.” The goals for the ex-offender ministry should be the same as any other ministry that you have been commissioned by the Lord to do.

Initial Preparation For The Ex-offender Ministry

The author urges the ministry leader/volunteer to “engage in prayer and explore if the ex-offender ministry is what God has called him/her to do. The ministry leader will experience challenges from many directions. Ex-offenders will emerge with their own motives and agenda who can potentially attempt to manipulate a situation to get what they want. The ex-offender ministry will consume much time and energy.”¹⁵⁰ As

¹⁴⁸ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 9.

Christian volunteers and leaders, we must do what God has put on our hearts in ministry in an effort to honor His Will. When engaging in any ministry within the church it is strongly encouraged that *ministry teams be developed*. Developing a ministry team one would have to tailor it based upon the types of people and conditions that are encountered. If there are ex-offenders who speak another language then the team should be comprised of someone who speaks that language, as male volunteers will be matched with male support and females supported by female team members. A basic background and demographic assessment should be gathered to determine how to administer support to the ex-offender will be helpful.¹⁵¹

Prepare For The Needs Of The Ex-offender

In preparing for the “*immediate needs* of the ex-offender; a variety of things need to be considered: shelter, food and clothing, medical treatment, substance abuse, fellowship, spiritual guidance and mentoring. While *secondary needs* might generally involve employment/vocational training, transportation, literacy and life skills training, educational (GED) support, and retention with immediate family.”¹⁵² These are only a few categories that identify the support that will be needed to assist the ex-offender.

Other Issues Regarding The Ex-Offender Ministry

Depending On The Direction Of The Holy Spirit

For the Christian, every day and night of our lives should be led and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is extremely important to be prayed-up every moment because one never knows when the enemy will unexpectedly attack. This author opens the eyes of

¹⁵¹ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 12-13.

¹⁵² Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 14-19.

the reader to be aware that the Christian who engages in ex-offender ministry will be met with spiritual warfare, because of demonic spirits influence many ex-offenders are dealt with... The important job of the minister is to determine what these demons are and through the Holy Spirit and word of God conduct spiritual warfare. Satan knows that Christians are fighting for the souls of men. It is recommended that all ex-offender and prison ministry members be equipped with the two gifts of the Spirit: *word of knowledge and word of wisdom*, and the '*Full Armor of God*' as it is described in I Cor. 12 of the Holy Bible."¹⁵³

Discipleship For The Ex-offender: Leaving The Nets

When Jesus calls one to follow Him and become His disciple, it is an anointed privilege and honor to all who answer. The author leads the reader to the Book of Mark 1:17, is where, Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He initiated the call of being a disciple to two fisherman named Simon and Andrew. The important points are that Jesus initiates the call to discipleship, discipleship is to follow Jesus and His word, discipleship requires that you leave old things in the past and follow Jesus, and the discipleship goal is to develop Christian character and become equipped to disciple other."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ Jones, *Equipping Your Church To Minister To Ex-Offenders*, 39.

Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man's Guide to Success After Prison, Author Demico Boothe, 2012.

The author, Demico Boothe, is a Federal ex-offender who wrote this book to shed some light on his experience in prison and to provide guidance to many African Americans on doing their time and living a productive life when they are released. He mentions the difficulty of a newly released person having no support systems when they get out of prison.

Many people on the outside who have never experienced incarceration do not give much thought to the struggles that ex-offenders face upon their release from prison. The ex-offender who has spent a great deal of time in prison is released into a changed world. The environment, technology, people and places he used to frequent have changed significantly. As the ex-offender pursues employment with no education, job references or skills, things become very hard in finding employment with a suitable wage to survive. Boothe from his own experience shares that “realistic options are more scarce when the ex-offender is a black man, a black man fresh out of prison, or a black man fresh out of prison with a felony on his record and no recent work history/skills to put on his resume, and being released into an unfavorable environment.”¹⁵⁵ Often the deck is already stacked against the ex-offender upon his/her release.

Despite Boothe's life's challenges during and after prison, he realized early on that having a positive attitude and making the best of the situation would eventually put him in a better place mentally and physically. As he places mind over matter he shares some thoughts on how “a newly released black man can improve his chances of success

¹⁵⁵ Damico Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man's Guide to Success After Prison* (United States: Full Surface Publishing, 2012), 10.

and sustaining himself and family in society... One common denominator for the offender is the desire to change their life circumstances by whatever resources that are available (religion and family) along with desiring to get out of prison and staying out of prison. A life style change is an important aspect in making a positive change. The mission of change for anyone who has been sent to prison should begin on the first day because this will increase their chances of success upon release.”¹⁵⁶

Doing Time: You’ve Got to Be There; Make the Best of It!

For anyone entering prison it is a challenge and one must prepare himself mentally and physically. I’m sure there are many thoughts of how you’re going to survive the experiences and people you encounter. There are a lot of thoughts that flow through the minds of the many who enter prison. Boothe suggests that those entering prison be honest with themselves and evaluate the circumstances that landed them in prison...Look at what could have been done different that would have changed the outcome of their situation.¹⁵⁷

Boothe speaks about two factors that relate to the course of life for people which involves one’s actions and thoughts or lack thereof. The events that occur in our lives are the result of an individual’s actions or inactions. One’s “thought process leads to his/her actions and with actions one is responsible for the outcome that emerges. Our thoughts, actions, and behaviors are influenced by the environment we live in, culture, upbringing, genetics, and education or lack thereof.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man’s Guide to Success After Prison*, 11.

¹⁵⁷ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man’s Guide to Success After Prison*, 16.

¹⁵⁸ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man’s Guide to Success After Prison*, 17.

This country should not be warehousing the astounding number of African Americans that are in prison today. However sad as this reality might be, the African American must think about how and why this crisis deserves corrective measures and attention. Boothe says that the overwhelming majority of black men in prison were not thinking when they committed their crimes, not thinking of the consequences of their actions when they committed the crime, not thinking about loved ones, their own future, and the historical struggles of the African American people in this world. Inadequate thinking most often leads a person to make bad decisions that result in drugs, gangs, criminal activity, prison, or death.¹⁵⁹

The biggest question with all of this is: Why weren't they thinking?.. Most people encounter problems in their lives when they don't think of the consequences that may follow their actions. The act of 'not thinking' emanates from a culture within several African American communities across the country that does not place a large premium on proper education, self-love, self-respect, self-determination and unity."¹⁶⁰ For many decades the African American culture has been stretched so wide and thin that many have become conditioned to accept the negative things that affect their culture. It is great that eyes are being opened to the numerous crises that have affected and infected the African American culture. The alarming number of incarcerated African Americans is only one starting point in addressing the crisis of African American culture.

¹⁵⁹ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man's Guide to Success After Prison*, 17.

¹⁶⁰ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man's Guide to Success After Prison*, 17.

I'm Out! Now What??

Now, when Boothe got out of prison he found himself challenged and frustrated with family issues and struggles of trying to find employment. The one thing that Boothe kept in mind was reminding himself where he just came from (prison). The thoughts of being in a cage without the freedom of the personal privileges that we take for granted everyday like doing whatever you want, whenever you want (making a phone call, waking up when you want or eating what you want) changed his thinking.¹⁶¹ Boothe would rather suck-it-up and tolerate these outside frustrations vs. returning to prison. For anyone family should be important.

The African American male is supposed to be the protector and provider for his family and yet so many are incarcerated or have a criminal history. The black male's support and strength for his family is practically nonexistent. Now that all of these issues have been brought to our attention, what are we going to do to fix this cultural and social mess? A good place to start is right where you are. The African American individual and community must make a change by picking themselves up, by dusting yourself off and pressing forward. Finding ways to become self-sufficient will be difficult, but it can be done if one changes their way of thinking and takes action.

Beyond Bars, Gerald Chrispin.

Some of the prisoners are being set free through the power of the gospel. Jesus touches the lives of some of the prisoners by way of the gospel. Some of the prisoners have reformed their lives as a result of the power of the gospel.

Lock The Cell Door And Throw Away The Key! Really

¹⁶¹ Boothe, *Getting Out & Staying Out: A Black Man's Guide to Success After Prison*, 34.

The author tells two separate stories of two men whose involvement with criminal activity landed them in prison. One person, “Tommy,” was extremely feared on the streets and in prison. Tommy had been reading his Bible that he carried around while in prison. One day Tommy attended a worship session where the gospel was being preached. Tommy affirmed the message that was being preached by gesturing with repeated nodding. The Christian shared with the forty inmates that, “Christ died for our sins upon the cross, bearing in His holy and sinless body the punishment that we deserve for that wrongdoing.”¹⁶² Providing the inmates with assurance, they were told ‘Any person who would really turn his back on his sins in repentance and trust Christ personally could know God’s forgiveness, a new life in Him, and the certainty of heaven to come.’¹⁶³

Within the days that followed “Tommy” was beginning to go through a transformation in his life. The spirit of God began to marinate his soul. Without warning God stopped “Tommy” in his tracks while in his cell... Tommy made contact with the local visiting Christian and confessed his sins before God and turned to Him in faith, realizing that Jesus had died for him... It is at this moment that the Bible had come alive and he prayed every day by his own choice. Christ had transformed him... Tommy was allowed to counsel other inmates because of his helpful influence on them. Because of the work that God has done by transforming “Tommy” and blessing him with love, grace, mercy and forgiveness, to whose benefit would it have been to “Lock the cell

¹⁶² Gerard Chrispin, *Beyond Bars: Looking inside the inside story* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publishing, 2007.), 15-16.

¹⁶³ Chrispin, *Beyond Bars: Looking inside the inside story*, 16.

door and throw away the keys.”¹⁶⁴ This is the mindset of many who elect not to be a part of the solution to a problem.

Can God Use A ‘Lifer’ Or A Christian Criminal?

The author provide countless scenarios that describe how an act of a person that appears so simple can take a turn for the worst and change the course of one’s life. The author directs the reader to see the love, grace and mercy of God working in everyone’s life regardless of their circumstances or sins that they have committed. Even in our brokenness and lowest point we must pray and ask God for His help. There are many accounts within this book where we learn that “God wants our repentance, lack of confidence in ourselves, to wholeheartedly to trust in Him... It is extremely important to walk with God day by day... Never give thought as a Christian that you are out of God’s merciful reach for Him to forgive you for your sins or His encompassing grace to use you... God is sovereign—He is in control!”¹⁶⁵ God can use anyone who repents and comes to Him with sincerity, love and trust.

When Prisoners Return. Merrifield, – Opening the doors for the Ex-Offender when they return back to society. Pat Nolan, 2004.

This book explores efforts that are made to prepare the Ex-Offender to live a healthy life, productive and law-biding lives. If Ex-Offenders are not provided with opportunities (employment, home, help) they are more likely commit a crime and return to prison. This book reveals ideas on how the Church can help ex-offenders make a positive transformation back into society by way of the gospel.

¹⁶⁴ Chrispin, *Beyond Bars: Looking inside the inside story*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Chrispin, *Beyond Bars: Looking inside the inside story*, 37-38.

The author introduces the dire need of assisting the ex-offender in transitioning back into the community. The church must “take the bull by the horns” and lead the charge in ministering with and mentoring the newly released ex-offender. Without a network of support and re-entry resources, the ex-offender is most likely sure to fail and at some point return to prison. It will take the efforts of a reentry team of people to make this intervention a success. The majority of ex-offenders upon their release are lost and need assistance or direction.

Most ex-offenders become frustrated when making decisions after their release. They have been incarcerated for a period of time and became conditioned to take orders and direction from the prison guards, so now the freedom to make their own decisions can be somewhat challenging to them. Ex-offenders require caring mentors to assist them in their needs. A welcoming church is very necessary for the health and future of the ex-offender, in keeping him/her grounded in the word of God and to help deter them from activity or behaviors that might land them in prison again. It is the church and mentor’s job to make the ex-offenders feel welcome in the church. Mentors are the safety net to assist the ex-offenders in making the least intimidating transition back into the community as possible. When prisoners return home, as Christian mentors we must receive them with the love that God has instilled in us and provide the necessary support and resources.

The Ex-Offender’s Guide to a Responsible Life, Harvey E. Shrum.

This book serves as a resource guide with a variety of tools to assist the ex-offender to re-adjust, stay out of jail and live a meaningful life. It teaches the ex-

offender how to develop meaning and purpose in their life. The book provides tools for finding a job, housing, living day to day, managing addiction, anger management, etc. This book is an excellent source for the ex-offender's re-entry into society. It reduces the tension of the ex-offender trying to figure out where to begin after their release from prison. This book is an instructional guide for ex-offenders.

4. The Urban Community

Code of the Streets, Elijah Anderson.

This book talks about a way of life and survival for many inner-city people in black America. The Code of the Streets grabs the realities of most urban communities, including the cultural and social dynamics of inner-city violence. The author, Elijah Anderson, shares ways of understanding the problem and a personal solution on how to fix some of the urban problems that many are faced with. This book will contribute to cultural insights in this Thesis-project because it will share diverse perspectives and hope for urban communities.

The author Elijah Anderson enlightens his readers with identifying some of the diversity of cultures in a given neighborhood. He takes the readers down a street that incorporates different classes of people, their social behaviors, working class, and the unemployed along with the educated and non-educated. One of the most disturbing issues he says is that many white residents have is a difficult time distinguishing people of color who are intending to commit a crime and those that are not.¹⁶⁶ Biases and stereotypes seem to get in the way when white people relate to black people.

¹⁶⁶ Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), 17.

The Code Of The Street - The urban resident growing up or residing in the inner city early on learns the code of the streets and adopts it as an awareness and a way of survival. Often the experience of inner-city environments requires a survival of the fittest mentality. Any one who travels about any urban community with a naive mentality might eventually fall victim to a mugging, burglary, carjacking, shooting or as an innocent bystander who just happened to be in harms way. Within the code of the street one has to know the appropriate time for rules of engagement. Living in an urban environment one should continuously assess their environment. The ‘code of the street,’ “amounts to a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior... Everybody knows that if the rules are violated, there are street penalties... The heart of the code is the issue of respect.”¹⁶⁷

Many problems in the inner-city stem from a community being deprived of funding, resources, employment and community programs. The result of community and cultural deprivation promotes frustration, violence, crime and a lack of hope for the future.¹⁶⁸ The code of the street defines the cultural dynamics and social boundaries of inner-city living and survival in the community, its individuals and within their families.

City of God: City of Satan, Robert Linthicum.

Chap. 1

The book begins by identifying our city as God’s Creation. I find that this title “Our city is God’s Creation” is a great beginning and it shows relevance to the book of Genesis. The scriptures in the Book of Genesis say: “In the beginning God created the

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, *Code of the Street*, 33.

¹⁶⁸ Anderson, *Code of the Street*, 32.

heavens and the earth.” The creation is significant to the foundations of life that mankind establishes along his/her journey within the cities where they may reside. As the time in our life cycle continues, so does the expansion of our population, cultures, cities and urban growth. One of the challenges that we find in our cities is rapid growth and over population. Through the growth of our cities from rural to urban, I find that there is a constant drive towards urban expansion. During the Creation, God commanded each development as an improvement toward the next revelation of life. I believe that with urban renewal and urban expansion we are expected to seek improvements in the manner that we live regardless of the size of the population.

Over population and urban growth have caused many cities to be in a crisis state. The overpopulation of many cities and countries causes a domino effect of crises not only relevant to population, but resources are also affected by urban expansion. The “water system, sewage, power and water supply, house, and food demands all become elements within this city crisis.”¹⁶⁹ The basic needs become a challenge when a growing population requires the same demands and there is not enough to go around. Sooner or later a city in crisis will begin to self-destruct as growth continues.

No matter how over populated our cities become, we are still called to a city as Christians to fulfill the will of God. Jesus traveled from city to city-big or small-and ministered; He was called to teach, preach, and heal many along His journey. As Christians emerging into a world that is becoming more and more populated, they should embrace the fact that now the gospel can be spread to many people in the same

¹⁶⁹ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.), 19.

place. Jesus continued to minister to the multitudes of people regardless of where their migration led them.

As we look back on different events, places, cities, and populations we find out just how Urban the Bible is. Linthicum describes the Bible as an Urban Book. The Bible goes far beyond its scriptural/Biblical content. The Bible is a book of scripture, historical events, instructional guide, poems, encouragement, laws, love, peace, psychology, healing etc. There are too many ways to describe the aspects of the Bible.

Linthicum makes reference to this world being a battlefield and that the greatest battlefields take place in our cities. God and Satan continue to do battle in our cities. The battle continues because people and cultures are not living according to God's laws. Satan will use every opportunity to tempt someone to follow him when they are at their weakest point or when one has disobeyed God's laws. There were many cities that were controlled by Satan, such as Babylon. "Regardless of what battles exist between God and Satan; the fact remains that "God is Yahweh—the one who causes to be what is caused to be."¹⁷⁰ The city is God's Creation because He commanded it to be so and God triumphs over all good/evil circumstances. There are several Biblical themes that reveal God's presence in the cities. God shows His love, grace and mercy. This first chapter reveals God presence in the urban city working everyday while having to stamp out Satan's flame every time a Child of God is tempted.

"Our City As The Abode Of Personal And Systemic Evil"

Chap. 2

From the moment that we are born there is evil that lurks around our lives. Sin shows no mercy upon us. Because of the nakedness of sin that was revealed by Adam

¹⁷⁰ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 28.

and Eve in the Book of Genesis, we are now born into sinful nature. Since the creation until today sin has made its mark with the Israelites, Israel's Prophets and the citizens of yesterday and today. Linthicum very clearly associates sin with the way that one lives his life. The idolatry, self-indulgence, exploitation, racism, oppression, economic injustices, social injustice, cultural and religious injustice, etc., are elements of sin. Evil within any city can emerge as a social, corporate, individual, local, global and international sin." Sin is everywhere you are.

Every city has a system of operation. Linthicum mentions that in an effort to understanding the nature of the city that you live in one must examine the primary systems that allow a city to work or function. The primary systems must then be analyzed from a biblical perspective. A closer look must be made into our basic systems such as the political, economic and religious systems. Breaking down these systems creates an opportunity to apply scripture. With the societal involvement and with diverse life systems, one must be aware of the corruption that may interfere with the process. While the Apostle Paul was preaching and proclaiming the Gospel, the evilness of the Roman Empire interrupted and corrupted the flow of his ministry and placed Paul in jail.

The book identifies that there are situations of politics and oppression. King Ahab exploited and oppressed the disadvantaged and the poor in order to sustain power and control over his throne. Ahab realized the source of Israel's commitment to Yahweh was through faith. In order for King Ahab to prosper in his empire he knew that he would have to attack faith and religion. There are some in our spiritual, religious and Christian realm who fight back against sin and evil. The prophet Elijah stood in opposition to King Ahab and challenged the priests of Baal to a battle between two gods.

The victor is the legitimate god. The fire of the Lord burned the sacrifice at the altar. Then it was revealed that the Lord—He is God. Despite the systemic evil that continues to interfere with our lives, God still maintains His divine hands of protection upon His people to thwart evil.

Finally, there are cosmos, good and evil forces that hover about this universe that affect our lives. Those good and evil forces are in opposition to one another and continuously clash. These forces moving towards a particular path, in life guide us. Those who are Christians holding to the faith are constantly tempted or confronted by evil forces to destroy their obedience, spiritual journey and relationship with God. And for those who are not in the faith, there is always a Christian ready to fulfill the will of God by encouraging others into the faith and walk with Jesus Christ. The city of God is an urban place where many are lost to evil. Christians strive to reveal that we do not live in a city of Satan. We live in a city of God because it belongs to God, He created it and we, as Christians are here to maintain it.

God So Loves the City. Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma, 1994.

Chap. 1

While diving into the thoughts of Donald McGavran I can't help but think about the idea of the urban discipleship and Dr. Villafañe's book on "*Seeking the Peace of the City.*" Dr. Villafañe's book describes many cultural dynamics within the urban cities. Donald McGavran begins his identification of the city as a rapidly growing urban city. The urban cities of yesterday have now become megacities. McGavran's ideas seems to

have very similar urban traits about culture, as does Dr. Villafañe's description of the city.

This book speaks about the changing dynamics of the urban city. The all too important urban cultural theme involves the ideals that make a community and what it has now become. The kinship connection, immigration, religion and poverty are only a few of the elements that mark the existence of urban culture. It is most important that we reflect upon our past to see clear the mission to go forward in urban ministry. Many of our urban Christian ministries have roots that date back as far as the fifties and sixties. From then until now there has been a noticeable growth of the urban black and Hispanic population. The fifties and the sixties brought about a divide in the overall perception of the city. During this time period the definition of urban missions was being challenged.

During the seventies and the eighties the church and the city began to evolve into a change. Evangelicals began to experience change. There were many things happening throughout the city. Urbanization began to take form where the church, schools, economic and political agendas changed the face of the urban city.

Over the years many urban practitioners have immersed themselves so deep into ministry that they sometimes forget to return to the surface for a breath of air. There are some who have used the more global approach and engaged in a broader missions campaign on seeing the bigger picture of our urban neighborhoods. I found myself drawn to the phrase in the book that said: "Easy answers cannot satisfy difficult questions, for easy answers come without struggles."¹⁷¹ This statement to me means that it is very difficult to advocate and tell others what should be done to address a situation

¹⁷¹ Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma, *God So Loves the City* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1994.), 3-4.

if you have not experienced the circumstances. Just think of a life-long rich man telling a poor person how they should they should be feeling about poverty. Now if the rich man rolled up his sleeves and lived the day-to-day life as a poor man, then the perception and interaction would produce a different outcome. One must experience or have compassion about the struggles that others have to live with in order to be an advocate in the struggle.

We must remember that throughout all our ministries, missions, discipleship efforts and evangelism Jesus comes because He is the answer. Despite our struggles and challenges Jesus is the source who can help us fix and improve the circumstances that we encounter in our urban communities. I thought it was great to mention in the book that sometimes practitioners get burned-out in their urban missions because their efforts become very personal and incorporated into their daily lives. I agree with addressing urban missions from an international missions approach, as one would aspire to walk in the life of Jesus. However, we are far from being the Messiah. As physical men and women we are only called to do what we can do within the context of how Jesus has permitted us to fulfill the will of God. As William Pannell expressed in the book, “The challenge to empower the poor begins with presence.” Healthy communities can be developed through indigenous leadership development or through committed Christians and their families living in communities of need. Many are called to serve as urban Christian ambassadors, but there are few who are willing to make a significant sacrifice to the cause.

Sometimes practitioners will dig deeper into the core of the urban neighbors where positive and negative developments occur. As neighbors become acquainted with

one another, treasures, revelations, sacrifice, suffering, evil and poverty begin to encircle our lives. The interaction that the urban missions/leader should be about is making a positive impact on the lives of others. I agree that it is essential for urban workers to do what God is doing. God invites us to join Him in His activity. I agree that the Mission Action must include the transformation of individuals and also the city itself. The church in the urban setting should reflect the people in the community.

Chap. 2

Van Engen begins to unravel the dynamics of cultural and government systems that are already in place from the time that we are born. Many people live their lives by a number of systems. There are worldly and godly structures that are very closely related. God provides structures in our lives so that we can relate to one another. There are economic structures in place to feed the poor. Systems and structures help one become neighbors. In chapter two the book continuously emphasizes the need for new structures and the establishment of neighbor-to-neighbor contact or interaction. Jesus always affirmed new structures for mankind. Jesus traveled from city to city expressing and setting an example of what is meant to be a neighbor wherever He went.

The mission in (*chapter 2*) helps one define what the word *neighbor* really means and how we can become a neighbor by choice or by design of a life-system. There are structures within the church and there are secular structures that shape what we do and how we react to situations. In order for the church, communities and government to operate, the structures must be understood so that neighbors can improve their urban mission and relationship with the church. It is all too important to tailor

missions to the neighborhood that you are serving. Jesus appeared where there was a need to help others and within that process Jesus became their neighbor.

The author exposes several characteristics that reveal the discipleship involved in being a neighbor. Being a neighbor would require one to engage in an act of help or kindness towards another person. When one walks in the Spirit the power of the Holy Spirit will direct you to love your neighbor as yourself. The Lord is continuously exposing mankind to new opportunities, new structures, new relationships, new neighborhoods, new systems and new revelations. Through these attributes we develop neighborhoods and neighbors in our pursuit of living out the honoring of the will of God. The author gives me much to think about when I explore and branch out into unfamiliar territories to perform urban ministry/missions. I must strongly consider any neighborhood as a neighbor first before I attempt to intrude into a system and a structure that has been in place for a period of time.

To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City, Gornik, Mark R. 2002.

Chapter one begins with the idea of the changing and declining neighborhoods. The Baltimore neighborhoods had been in a down spiral where the sight of abandoned houses and neighborhoods turning into slums seemed to be, a normal condition of what is called the urban community. Over time the neighborhoods become run down and excluded from their appeal compared to other neighborhoods. The author Gornik speaks about how the declining appearance of the neighborhood is not only about the physical structures. The poverty of a neighborhood has more damaging effects than one can imagine. People are affected by socioeconomic, political, physical, death, violence,

drugs, theft, genocide and a wealth of other circumstances that plague their lives. The lack of employment, hospitals, clinics, services and resources can make a neighborhood a very hopeless and disheartening place to live. The author begins his exploration into this broken neighborhood by first conducting a historical analysis. This neighborhood's historical analysis will shed light on the dynamics of this community and how things have evolved into what it is at the present time. When we explore the histories of some of our urban neighborhoods we also have to look at culture, generational issues, migration, slavery, segregation, social issues, race and gender before an accurate assessment can be reached. The aforementioned urban cultural hindrances are all too familiar to some of my experiences of growing up in several urban communities.

Today many of the same negative sources, if not more, maintain the shadow of poverty over urban neighborhoods. Now we see governments and laws that target particular races and gender to keep them in impoverished and in an oppressed state of existence. The author is right on point when he mentions how the after affects of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King impacted many urban communities worldwide. After Dr. King's death there existed a sense of brokenness and hopelessness among many African Americans. Many were experiencing emotional, physical, cultural, spiritual and economic pain.

By way of politics, power and money, urban neighborhoods continue to be excluded from becoming prosperous and hindered from advancing in upward mobility beyond poverty. Even though some communities seem to improve, all too often the urban communities are still in their run down state. When there are employment opportunities available for urban youth the only jobs that they qualify for are domestic

duty positions. Ms. Iris M. Young analyzes injustice as oppression. Ms. Young contends that: “oppression reveals itself in five faces (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence). I find it very beneficial to learn or hear the author address the many examples and revelation of brokenness that are associated with the urban neighborhoods.

For years and decades the injustices of many cultures, urban communities and families of color have been cast in the shadows of a suppressed world while subjected to poverty, discrimination and identified as the low class of society. I agree with the author who says: “a main theme of the inner-city that requires our attention is its status as a community excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, and economic status. As a result of such exclusion, there has been a disintegration of community institutions and the ability to meet the basic needs of life.”¹⁷² The Apostle Paul emphasizes that “the basis of a new community is established not by achievement or statue, but by the grace through the death of Christ.”¹⁷³ The scriptures say: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...*” (Eph. 2:8).

Chap. 2, A Church of the Streets

The church in the inner or urban city has become a foundation of great religious and cultural significance. As the cathedral displayed signs of decay, Archbishop Romero saw fit to focus more on the suffering impoverished people instead of spending their resources on renovations. The book mentions that in the American inner city the church is called to be a community of the excluded, the forgotten and the outcast. The main

¹⁷² Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K. : William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.), 57.

¹⁷³ Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City*, 60.

foundational purpose of the church as a community should be to fulfill the will of the kingdom of God.

The church of today must not allow itself to become detached from the urban community. Now is the time to learn and embrace what cultures and communities have struggled with for so long and take this opportunity to apply the word of God to the lives of the people so that they are built up in the Spirit. There are many churches that need to be renewed or revived. The church should be a place of incarnation.

The Common Life of the Church

The common life refers to the formation and discipleship for faithful expression of the church's participation in God's story of renewal. God's story of renewal incorporates people caring for one another, establishing positive patterns of relationships, being neighborly and being serious about whatever call that God has placed on your life. God's story looks at your walk with Christ.

I like the message of the church as a community of grace. In 2 Cor. 12: 9, God speaks to me when the scripture says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." There have been trials in my life where all that I could do to ease the pain or disappointment was to look to the Lord and repeat the scripture: "My grace is sufficient for you..." The church must provide a welcoming environment to its people and neighbors. The word of God is welcoming to mankind and the church is in the position to do so as advocate of God's love and grace.

Many urban communities and urban churches have been met with hardships along their journey, and each individual and church has its own testimony of struggles and despair. Now is the time for reconciliation. Reconciliation for the church comes

when it moves beyond the hurt and pain that has been endured within it. Then individuals must reconcile their own circumstances in order to regenerate renewal, health and growth within themselves. The author talks about the church as being a sharing church not only with the gospel, but also among one another. This is so true; when you share with one another, you exhibit caring and love for your neighbor. The act of sharing promotes ministry at work and an act of discipleship. The author writes: “Sharing recognizes the peaceable future of God and reflects new life in the Spirit.”

5. Discipleship

Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee when he observed two brothers Simon-Peter and his brother Andrew. While they cast their nets, Jesus approached the brothers and said, “Come follow me.” They immediately abandoned their nets and followed Jesus. Discipleship requires that Christians answer the call of Jesus. Disciples are followers of Christ.

Arrested Spiritual Development?

In our discipleship efforts we search for guidance through the Holy Spirit to teach, disciple and minister to others. Discipleship requires that “church leaders be purposeful in making disciples—Christians who are mature in their faith can share it with others and produce more disciples... Church leaders who are dedicated in developing a healthy environment promote spiritual growth.”¹⁷⁴

Discipleship Blueprints

Discipleship encompasses a great deal of Christian character, commitment, spirituality and dedication to the ministry of Jesus Christ. The author defines Christian

¹⁷⁴ Ron Bennett, *Intentional Disciplemaking* (Colorado Springs, CO. : NavPress Publishing, 2001.), 13.

discipleship “as a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.”¹⁷⁵

Jesus: and the Victory of God, N.T. Wright, 1996.

The author presents his thoughts on the identity, thoughts and intentions of the historical Jesus. He profiles Jesus then and now, his prophecies and stories of the kingdom. Many of the missions and beliefs of Jesus are presented to the reader along with reasons why the crucifixion of Jesus occurred. This book is helpful in this thesis-project because it contributes a foundation of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and how His sacrifice for our sins helps us find appreciation in Him.

Basic Types Of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry Of Healing & Growth, Howard Clinebell.

This book provides suggestions and methods for pastoral care and counseling, reality therapy and crisis intervention. This resource guide will be helpful to this thesis-project during the re-entry, mentoring, discipleship phase in understanding what the needs are, and in offering the support that the inmate or ex-offender might require.

6. Shalom in the City

Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry, Dr. Eldin Villafañe, 1995.

This book is used by the Spirit of the living God to challenge the people of God to “seek the peace of the city.” This book begins with the Jeremiah Paradigm.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett, *Intentional Disciplemaking*, 23.

Within the forward of the book a parallel is drawn with the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. During that time there was much corruption as the government exercised acts of cruelty and power over the people in Jerusalem. During Jesus ministry, He knew that He would have to confront the tyranny in order to complete His messianic mission. Despite the aftermath of the social struggles and devastation of government cruelty and control, Christians are expected to serve the needs of the poor. The Christian “Church continues to be challenged by conflicting beliefs, philosophies, government and desperate human need.”¹⁷⁶

The book identifies that the “Holy Spirit is central to the mission of the church in today’s urban world.”¹⁷⁷ It is also revealed that there is the reality of the power and powerless state of an Urban Christian society.

Dr. Villafañe begins his book by identifying himself, his Puerto Rican heritage and Christian-Pentecostal roots. He is known as the founding father of CUME. Dr. Villafañe was motivated or driven by the Spirit of God to capture the fresh inspiration within the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “And seek the Peace [*Shalom*] of the city... and pray to the Lord for it; for in its Peace [*Shalom*] you will have Peace [*Shalom*]” (29: 7).

Dr. Villafañe shares his concern for the city because of the existence and the realities of the mindless violence of youth and the institutionalized violence that is played out in the inner city. I like the quote that Dr. Villafañe expressed when he said:

¹⁷⁶ Eldin Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995.), xii.

¹⁷⁷ Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, xiii.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish,”¹⁷⁸ (Prov. 29: 18). The NIV reads: Where there is no revelation, the people cast restraint.”¹⁷⁹ The absence of vision results in a social meltdown, a moral and Spiritual disintegration. We live in a social culture that consists of many sub-cultures within the inner city. Within these social cultures there is a sense of brokenness/a mentality of the urban youth that is associated with the “New Jack City” Syndrome/crisis.

The Jeremiah Paradigm stems from the theological concept that is associated with three words: Presence, Peace and Prayer.

1. Presence: Jeremiah 29: 5-6
2. Peace: Jeremiah 29: 7a
3. Prayer: Jeremiah 29: 7b

He says: The church gathers to worship and equip itself to impact the polis. It does not live for itself, but for the kingdom (rule, sovereignty) of God. The church cannot be indifferent to the human needs in the city.

Chap. 1

When you are called into service/Scholarship: A servant of the Lord comes from a diversity of vocations. Our scholarship and gifts are to be used for the gratification of God’s kingdom and to satisfy His Will. We are called to preach the gospel to the poor ... to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance. Scholarship connects the social, physical and theological components of ministry. The ministry of Jesus involved teaching, preaching and maintaining a personal relationship with the people in each city.

¹⁷⁸ Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 2.

Chap. 2

Spirituality: An exploration into Social Spirituality in the midst of evil.

“If the whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world, it must have a “holistic” spirituality.” A spirituality that is authentic and relevant should correlate with all of life; the Spirit of the Lord: a spirit that leads, and empowers, must lead and empower all areas of our lives. *Transformation:* Personal transformation into the image of Christ must be done by grace, faith and prayers.

Chap.3

Power of the Powerless: A way of gaining strength through your brokenness. It is at the cross where we find salvation. In our powerless, poverty, brokenness and submissive state of being, we look to the cross for redemption, salvation and the power of God to show grace and shalom. The wisdom of God is revealed in 1 Cor. 1: 24. “For when I am weak, then I am strong,” (2 Cor. 12: 9-10, NIV).

Chap.4

Burning Patience: = Hope = Shalom with one’s self, in the city, and in the church. Burning Patience is a critical part for engaging in effective ministry within the not too desirable cities. Burning Patience is that quality of faith that any city can and must believe that the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ makes a difference. (See: p.44 Now and Not Yet).

Chap.5

Ethnic Leadership and Evangelism: The dynamics of cultural ethnicity go through a transformation and generate a wider outlook on the endeavors of urban society in the city. Cultural Ethnicity in the city created a concentration with incorporating (1)

Kerygma: Proclaiming the Gospel, (2) Koinonia: Community/Fellowship with believers, and (3) Diaconia: Service of the Gospel.

Chap.6

Cultural reconciliation:

Dr. Villafañe speaks about “*racial Shalom*,” shared space. As a result of two cultures and their secular music becoming infused together, today we have what is called Latin Jazz. Two cultures shared their personal, cultural and musical space to generate “*racial Shalom*.” This cultural experience brought the harmony, reconciliation and wholeness of a peaceful existence between two cultures in the urban community.

Chap.7

Sociocultural Identification: Sociocultural Identification exposes what is called the Three C’s. The Three C’s are the elements of a matrix.

1. Cultural/social reality – cultural migration.
2. Communication/languages – the integration of cultures and their languages.
3. Church – is where clusters of cultures and people, immigrants come together for worship.

Chap.8

Global Mission: Education Seminary Based Education Program, The Six C’s – are essential elements for an effective seminary-based urban theological education program.

1. Constituency: Whom are we educating? (Clergy v. “People of God”)
2. Contextualization: Incarnation. “Pitch our Tent” – seminary resources: Financial, intellectual and personal, etc. “Urban Kenosis” = emptying oneself for the

service of others. Contextualization implies a commitment to the Shalom of the city.

3. Curriculum: (1) to form pastors and teachers, (2) inform about Scripture, tradition, social, cultural and historical context, (3) serve as agents of transformation in the churches or wherever God has placed them/you.
4. Community: Seminary-Based Urban Theological Educational Programs will not survive without the blessings or credibility of its host community.
5. Coexistence: With Host Seminary – Involvement should be clearly understood, should be long-range, a serious commitment and stewardship of resources – Financial, etc.
6. Cost – Involve financial, physical, personal and Spiritual investments that are made of seminary commitment to Urban Ministry.

Shalom: Within the Hebrew language the word Shalom represents peace. Other derivative references of Shalom illuminates the sense of wholeness or completeness. As I associate the term *shalom* with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I could say that God represents peace, wholeness and completeness in my life, in the city and in all that I do. As I live for God I find the perfect *shalom*.

7. Internet Sources

Slavery In America, History.com Staff.

This article provides the history of the African American culture and people, how they were forced into slavery and hijacked to America by ships. Through slavery the African became the African American. This article is beneficial to this thesis-project because it helps the reader understand the African American's cultural struggles past and

present.

What is Social Justice? (Department of Government and Justice Studies), Matthew Robinson PhD, and John Rawls. Both authors provide the reader with an opportunity to see how the social, ethnic, cultural and legal scales are tilted as they relate to urban communities and social justice. This article will be helpful in this thesis-project because it develops an awareness in addressing issues in urban communities.

Moral Injury, Brett Litz.

The author assists the reader in understanding the effects of moral injury by sharing a glimpse into the psychological, cultural and spiritual perspectives. This topic on moral injury will be helpful in this thesis-project because we can associate the effects of moral injury within urban communities, culture and people who are most vulnerable.

Population Reference Bureau (PRB): U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate, Tyjen Tsai and Paola Scommegna.

This article provides data, charts and information on the incarceration rates in the United States. This is helpful to this thesis because it reveals the alarming and disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic males who are incarcerated in U.S. prisons.

Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Lea Sakah.

This article provides data, charts and information on the incarceration rates in the United States. This is helpful to this thesis because it reveals the alarming and disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic males who are incarcerated in U.S. prisons.

One Year Recidivism Rates: 2014 Release Cohort: Massachusetts Department of Corrections, Thomas A. Turco III, Commissioner.

This article provides data, charts and information on the recidivism rates in Massachusetts. This is helpful to this thesis because it reveals the alarming and disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic males who are returning to U.S. prisons shortly after their release.

Can We Close the Revolving Door?: Recidivism vs. Employment of Ex-offenders in the U.S. , Richard Freeman (Harvard University and National Bureau of Economic Research).

This study/article provides insight on data relating to recidivism rate, ex-offender population, reentry and employment. This article will be helpful to this thesis-project because it helps in understanding the nexus between all of the aforementioned insights.

Obama Wants to End Mass Incarceration, Leon Neyfakh.

In a speech President Obama calls for criminal justice reform. This article is important to this thesis-project because it will once again validate that the United States and its cities are in a crisis with the incarceration rate and the effects that it has on social and cultural populations.

Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2015, Peter Wagner and Bernadett Rabuy.

This article provides a more up to date view and a chart of the incarceration crisis in the U.S. This is helpful to this thesis because it reveals the incarceration rate of people in U.S. prisons.

CHAPTER THREE

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL FOR EX-OFFENDERS

Jesus Prays for All Believers—“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me, (Jn. 17:20-21, NIV).

This passage speaks to the believers in Christ within this world who would heed the mission and sanctification of the Lord. Jesus anticipates the believer will spread the gospel to everyone, and He prays that as a result of the gospel that new believers will freely come. This invitation that Jesus has expressed is open to all believers.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “And God said” ‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind’ (Gen. 1:24). Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule...over all the earth, over all the creatures that move along the ground,” (Gen. 1:26). “So God created man in his own image... in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

-----Genesis 1:27
(New International Version)

Through God’s creation a perfect world was formed, but due to the fall, our world became tainted by sin. This sin would change the dynamics of this world for decades to come. God’s creation became the first living system in this universe. Despite the fact that our world has been forever changed, God still remains in control of everyone and every thing. God has designed His living system for all to share. The organic unity that God introduces has provided the corporate church as our living

system. The “church represents the body of Christ.”¹⁸⁰

As Jesus began his ministry, He preached and taught the gospel wherever He journeyed. He healed the sick and fed the poor. Later He called each of the disciples and commissioned them to do the same, as they accepted this divine invitation and followed Jesus. As the church ministers, teaches and preaches the gospel to the multitude of believers all over the world and as they are anointed by this gospel of Jesus Christ being spoken, they emerge into a “*Quiet Revival*” as the church in and around them continuously grows. The church is the living system that God has designed for believers.

For many in this world the gospel has not yet penetrated their souls and they remain in a fallen existence without Christ in their life, no direction and no hope for their future. In today’s climate there are many who exist in a broken world cluttered with poverty, crime, violence, heartache, hurt, evilness, pain, spiritual pain and temptation. They are scattered among the debris of the sinful nature in the world. Despite these life-haunting barriers that people experience, we must continue to pray for others and ourselves while pressing towards the truth in God’s word and the salvation of the Lord.

Living Systems Ministry with ex-offenders

In this examination of a *Living System Ministry* with ex-offenders within the urban church we find that their worship is often hidden behind the scars and in the shadows of their past. God calls the church through Living System Ministry and missions to minister to ex-offenders. The ex-offenders’ past is their journey, but their pain we all share as Christians. Within our living systems one must realize that, “God’s story is all about redemption...the transforming power and grace of God that brings

¹⁸⁰ Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, & Steve Daman, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers. 2010.), 50.

salvation and enables those of us who are Christians in this fallen world actually to begin to reflect the way creation was originally designed to operate.”¹⁸¹ God is calling the church to meet the needs of the people. The living system that God has provided Christians and practitioners with will help in ministering to ex-offenders and others.

Complex living systems identifies how primary and secondary cultures have evolved. The understanding of “complex living systems” is helpful, because it provides insight into the changing dynamics of human and social interaction. Primarily living systems deal with what God has created. Through Living System Ministry, we discover “the fruit that remains” and the fruit that multiplies. “Multiplication is the natural outcome of living system ministry.”¹⁸²

Primary and Secondary Relationships

One starting approach for engaging in Living System Ministry and Missions is to realize that ministry with ex-offenders requires that the practitioner understand their culture. Viewing ex-offenders from a social construct that identifies them from two perspectives perhaps would refine the understanding of their culture. These two constructs consist of primary and secondary relationships. The practitioner must build primary and secondary relationships to obtain one’s trust. The “primary relationship reveals the way people relate to one another, while the secondary relationships reveals a more impersonal tone.”¹⁸³ With the primary relationship the parties involved appear to have more of a comfortable direct connection with one another. And secondary

¹⁸¹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 1.

¹⁸² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 247.

¹⁸³ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 17.

relationships appear to be more casual in nature. Secondary relationships do not solicit interaction with one on one communication. A *primary relationship* requires individuals to talk or interact with people they know on a personal basis. But, with the secondary relationship individuals recognize another's in passing or frequenting the same environment.¹⁸⁴

Primary and Secondary Cultures

From the outset of primary and secondary relationships the practitioner begins to associate culture into the equation. In the awaking moment of “*primary cultures* one begins to observe the great strengths it possesses in meeting social needs.”¹⁸⁵ Within *primary cultures* there is a dependence upon relational ties with one another, while secondary cultures do not require dependent factors or relational ties. Both primary and secondary cultures have their distinct characteristics where the needs of each are met. Primary and secondary cultures can possess two distinct approaches in handling a task and yet they still attain the same results of their goal. Within the primary culture people work together to accomplish their work.¹⁸⁶

The foundation for meeting one's needs is relational. Needs are relational because people rely upon relationships with others to meet their needs. Both the practitioner and the subject (ex-offender) become relational because the ex-offender has needs to be met and the practitioner has a Christian need to help others.

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

¹⁸⁴ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 18.

¹⁸⁵ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 19.

¹⁸⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster: Living Systems Ministry in a Technological Age*, 21.

But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." (2 Tim 2:8-10, NIV)

I selected this passage of scriptures because the Apostle Paul in his distress and being chained remains obedient to faith in God's almighty power and word. Paul lets us know that no suffering is too great for God, if it brings salvation to God's chosen people who believe, no matter where one might be in this life -- broken, imprisoned, poor, suffering, etc. *The Apostle Paul* was living in a poor urban community when he encountered his incarceration. During Biblical times Paul was in prison and endured many hardships. He had to endure the cruelty of being beaten, chained and having his freedom denied. Paul was dealing with a living system in prison. One must hold to the Biblical truth that God is in our midst even when we might not deserve His grace and mercy. The God that we have come to know is a loving and a caring God. God is not here to condemn us for our falls, He is available to love and encourage what is pleasing to Him through His word and by the Holy Spirit. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," (Jn 3:16).*

Paul was not always an Apostle. Paul began his evil acts and attitude in setting out to persecute the church of God far beyond measure (Gal 1:13)... At the peak of his evil acts, Paul was on the road to Damascus when he encountered the risen Christ. With the mere presence of Christ the anointing came upon Paul and he was immediately transformed. Paul's conversion changed his life for the better. Paul's old evil ways were now cast out and he began to live his life for the Lord Jesus Christ. The associates from Paul's past life in Jerusalem were so extremely upset when he made his conversion, Paul

was taken to Caesarea to be placed on a ship bound for Tarsus to evangelize the Gentiles.¹⁸⁷

This short story about Paul reveals the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has the authority and the power to meet and confront anyone in life right where they are, no matter what road they are on or whatever circumstances in their life. *God can use everyone that He created for His divine purpose.* As the anointing of the Lord confronts you at that immediate moment you are not in control of your life; Jesus Christ is in control. After Paul's transformation he had to take off the old self and put on the new. Paul could no longer go back to his old way of thinking and performing sinful deeds. Now Paul in putting on his new self would have to live in a Christ-like manner, doing what is pleasing to God.

Paul ending his 2 Corinthians message concluded with a benediction: *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, (2 Cor 13:14)...* Within this benediction Paul leads us to the trinity and presents his understanding of salvation and of God. This benediction with Christians has been a source of comfort, theological and moral insight."¹⁸⁸

Prisoners In The Bible

Dating back as far as the beginning of time people have encountered or experienced the realities of imprisonment. Genesis 39:16-20 describes how Joseph's master became angry and placed him in prison. *Joseph* was falsely accused by the

¹⁸⁷ Ronald Youngblood et al., *Nelson's Compact Bible Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.), 461-462.

¹⁸⁸ Eldin Villañae, *A Prayer for the City: Further Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Austin, TX: AETH Publishing, 2001.), 4.

master's wife and ended up in prison for doing what was right in the eyes of God. The masters' wife attempted to seduce Joseph and he refused because he knew that doing so would be immoral and ungodly. Joseph was a godly man and when he was faced with the temptation of seduction he immediately turned it down.¹⁸⁹ Joseph realized that he must turn away from the temptation at all times regardless of the outcome. There are several episodes in the Bible where many were arrested, persecuted, beheaded and crucified.

There are many who end up in prison because an individual, a society of people or a system becomes angry with an individual or group and subsequently one gets persecuted. However, there are moments when someone is placed into prison because of his or her wrongful acts. Regardless of the reasons for incarceration, the life-changing experience is never welcomed. The Old and New Testaments describe many accounts of individuals who have been arrested and imprisoned, such as Joseph, Jesus, Peter, Apostle Paul, John the Baptist, etc. Often imprisonment is accompanied by a lengthy period of time in confinement where one is shut off from the freedoms of society. The book of Genesis speaks of Joseph's long duration in prison. Joseph spent at least two years in prison (Chapter 40, verse 5). I can only imagine that the time one spends in prison is equivalent to being in the wilderness. I associate the word "prison" with wilderness because it represents a sense of isolation or confinement within oneself. Nevertheless, throughout all of Joseph's encounters while in prison, the Lord was with Joseph all the time.

¹⁸⁹ Zach Sewell, *Prisoners in the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012.), 12.

The Apostle Paul: It was the Apostle Paul's faith and continuous Bible Study that kept him grounded in the Lord. Paul embraced his time in prison and became spiritually free by himself by immersing himself in the Word of the Lord.

Peter was arrested and persecuted by King Herod because he belonged to the Christian Church. During the feast of "Unleavened Bread" Peter was arrested and put into prison. Note: Peter was basically arrested for being a faithful servant of the Lord.

John the Baptist spoke out against this adultery and subsequently Herod had John arrested, thrown into prison and later beheaded because of Herodias' lies, deceit, evilness and hatred. (Mk 6: 17)

Jesus was arrested, persecuted and later crucified even though Pontius Pilate did not regard Jesus as a serious revolutionary threat to his authority. Jesus died because the nature of the crimes that He was accused of committing was punishable by death according to Jewish Law (Deut 13).¹⁹⁰ Those who were arrested in the Bible maintained their faith and a relationship with the Lord during their incarceration and after.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ represented a new hope to Christian believers. Through Christianity we learn that God resurrected Jesus from the dead. In the absence of the resurrection Paul "asserts our preaching and faith would be meaningless, (1 Cor 15:14)... The resurrection of Jesus is extremely important to humanity because without it there would be no church or Christianity, and we would continue to be captured by sin, (1 Cor 15:17)."¹⁹¹ Through the resurrection Christians can validate that Jesus is the

¹⁹⁰ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory Of God* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1996), 548.

¹⁹¹ Ronald Youngblood et al., *Nelson's Compact Bible Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.), 518.

Messiah, the risen Christ. During the life and ministry of Jesus, He sought to love, teach & preach the gospel, heal, help, promote peace and disciple others into His ministry.

Theology of Shalom

The “*Theology of Shalom*” seeks to bring peace and wholeness to the people in a fallen world. Through “redemptive methods” a ministry of redemptive peace answers the call to bring a troubled world to a sense of wholeness, calmness and peace. The English translation for shalom is generally referenced as peace; the perfect peace that God provides, the peace from within and the peace that we give to others. In the Hebrew language shalom is translated as peace. Shalom exposes the reality and hope of wholeness toward people and the society at large. With the Theology of Shalom we pray for God’s perfect shalom (Peace) in the broken urban centers of this world. Shalom emanates from the gospel as it is preached. The word of God and Jesus Christ is peace and brings wholeness to those who hear and embrace the word.

As the Old Testament sheds light on shalom, we learn that “the root meaning of shalom is peace. However, there are several derivative words that are associated with the word shalom such as welfare, prosperity, completeness, wholeness, well-being, justice and deliverance.”¹⁹² “Shalom displays expressions of harmony and reconciliation—it sets out to respond to the needs of the whole person. Shalom contains three components: peace with God (Rom 5:1); peace of God (Phil 4:7); and seek the peace of the city (Jer 29:7)... The core of shalom stems from the gospel. “Graceful-shalom points towards the mission of the church.”¹⁹³ The church is a place of peace for the city.

¹⁹² “Wikipedia Encyclopedia,” *Shalom*, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shalom>

¹⁹³ Villafañe, *A Prayer for the city*, 10-11.

Theology of Context (Presence) speaks to our relationship to the city, culture and to the church. Christians and residents who live in the urban centers have a relationship with the culture and the church. Their presence is known by their involvement and connection with these components of our living system. Our theological presence requires us to become engaged in the community and within the church through a building of relationships.

Theology of Mission involves the spirit of *peace*, but the health of the church and its growth must be ubiquitously spread out to reach its ministry. The church “must demonstrate this by its word and actions a true Kerygma, Koinonia, Diakonia, and Leitourgia. The church preaches and lives out the *shalom* of God in the city.”¹⁹⁴

In *Kerygma* ministry mission the church announces the Good News and expresses peace through Jesus. The church’s mission is to feed the worshipers with preaching the gospel to them, filling them with messages of conviction, hope, peace and love of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁵

With the *Koinonia* ministry mission, there is constant fellowship and connection with the community, assuring them that the peace of God is omnipresent in their lives. There is no place that God cannot deliver His peace. God interacts with every aspect of our lives. Within the “church the believer seeks to get involved in activities that evoke signs of God’s presence in the world.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Eldin Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995.), 53.

¹⁹⁵ Villafañe, *A Prayer for the city*, 11.

¹⁹⁶ Villafañe, *A Prayer for the city*, 22.

The *Diakonia* ministry mission addresses the church and Christian ministry by providing the act or service of shalom to hurting and broken people.¹⁹⁷ This ministry mission rings home to the many urban communities across the country that are broken and hurting with despair because of the many crises that have struck the urban communities in recent months and years.

There have been numerous police-involved shootings where innocent black victims have been killed. Working police officers are assassinated as they perform their respective duty of serving and protecting the people of our cities. Of the many military service men and women who serve and protect our country, some who have sacrificed their lives are hurting. People in the urban communities are dying at the hands of gun violence, robberies, drug activity, substance abuse and gang violence. The overpopulation of young African American men in U.S. prisons are representative of those who are broken and hurting. The world terror has shaken our cities -- from the 911 World Trade attacks to the Marathon bombings in Boston during 2013. The people in third world countries live in poverty and are broken and hurting. The homeless in every city who are in poverty are broken and hurting.

There are numerous situations where the people of our cities need help. The many broken and hurting people in our cities need the peace and Spirit of God in their lives. All of these tragic events in our cities call for the church to bring shalom to broken and hurting people in every city across the globe.

¹⁹⁷ Villafañe, *A Prayer for the city*, 11.

Through the *Leitourgia* ministry mission, the church brings joy to the people as they celebrate and worship the Prince of Peace.¹⁹⁸ Jesus is the Lord and savior of mankind and He is worthy to be praised. Sometimes Jesus is taken for granted by those individuals that always pray to Jesus for something. It would be great if we often awake to praise the Lord Jesus and offer or surrender ourselves in being of service to the Lord. Having the mindset and spirit to honor Jesus through prayer, thanksgiving, love, and exhibiting kind gestures to others is pleasing to the Lord. We celebrate Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace through worship and prayer.

Theology of Spirituality (Prayer): “Spirituality—a particular style of approach to union with God, a following of Jesus Christ, a style of living the life of the Holy Spirit, In obedience to God, the following of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.”¹⁹⁹

We pray because we honor and worship the Lord. We pray because there is strength and power in the Lord. We pray because in our brokenness we seek God’s favor, love, grace and mercy. We pray because our weak and vulnerable souls need the almighty power of the Lord to protect and give us peace in our lives. We engage in prayer to God to establish our relationship and connectedness to Him through the triune Godhead, the Trinity. We pray to God for divine guidance and peace and wholeness in our lives. We pray to God for deliverance and hope. We pray because it is pleasing to God when we seek Him. In every aspect of our lives we should be devoted to prayer, submitting ourselves prostrate before the Lord. Our souls require the fulfillment of God’s presence. We pray because of the healing power of the Lord. We pray because we need God. God answers prayer as we earnestly seek Him.

¹⁹⁸ Villafañe, *A Prayer for the city*, 11.

¹⁹⁹ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 12-13.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” (Phil 4:13, NKJV).

“Be earnest and unwearied and steadfast in your prayer [life], being [both] alert and intent in [your praying] with thanksgiving. And at the same time pray for us also, that God may open a door to us for the Word (the Gospel), to proclaim the mystery concerning Christ (the Messiah) on account of which I am in prison; That I may proclaim it fully and make it clear [speak boldly and unfold that mystery], as is my duty, (Col 4:2-4, AMP).”

In preparing to carry out Living System Ministry and Mission with ex-offenders within the urban church, a holistic approach of spirituality is crucial to the spiritual growth of everyone involved. It is important that the church aligns itself with the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the people. The gospel seeks to minister to the people. Ex-offenders yearn for the church to offer support in their spiritual poverty as they seek a way of hope, a way out of distress, and a way to know Christ. We are living in troubling times and our cities need prayer.

A Prayer of Shalom for the City

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you [the Holy City]! May peace be within your walls and prosperity within your palaces! For my brethren and companions' sake I will now say, Peace be within you! For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek, inquire for, require your good. (Psalm 122:6-9, AMP).

“Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25). Only Jesus can save the city! Only Jesus can release the individuals, the systems we create, and all of the created order from the power of sin, death and the law.”²⁰⁰

In many urban communities prayers are given for the gospel to reach the people and their wellness is much needed to provide hope, a sense of contentment, wholeness and *shalom*.

²⁰⁰ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 125-126.

A Prayer for the city's economic growth: Urban centers are starving for economic wellness because they have been oppressed by poverty for so long. "God wants our prayers to be prayers for the economic well-being of the city and for all citizens."²⁰¹ Urban centers are in dire need of funding and resources for urban programs. Economic support is necessary to fund a re-entry ministry for ex-offenders to prevent the recidivism rate from rising in the United States. Our cities will be thwarted from growing economically if the majority of our urban African American males continue to be incarcerated in U.S. prisons.

A Prayer for the city's safety: Too often the daily news captures stories and images of social unrest and violence that have been infecting and affecting our urban centers for some time. Urban communities seek hope for the safety of their cities. Safety means being able to walk the streets day or night and not having to think about being hurt, violated, robbed or killed at the hands of some evil person lurking the streets. We must also pray for the enemy; *"those who commit crime upon others and their property... God's people are called to pray for those in prison and to become their advocates."*²⁰²

"Remember those who are in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are liable to bodily sufferings." (Heb 13:3, AMP).

We pray that offenders stop hurting themselves, their families and community; STOP the madness in our urban cities throughout the world. We pray for the safety and *shalom* in the city.

²⁰¹ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 150.

²⁰² Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 151.

A Prayer for the city's political order: Every city in America is at the mercy of its political infrastructure. Within this political order, citizens rely upon the integrity, financial support and leadership of the officials to respectfully and honestly serve their constituents in the community. In our call to be submissive to authority, we are called to be respectful and obedient to authority. We rely upon our government and political leaders to assist communities in their needs. The laws of all commonwealths are established to provide order and to ensure that civil obedience among their citizens is adhered to. Political and legal order is necessary to direct, control, nurture and assist cities when necessary. We pray that the political order and its integrity respectfully and properly serve the people of this commonwealth with *shalom*.

“First of all, then I admonish and urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be offered on behalf of all men, For kings and all who are in positions of authority or high responsibility, that [outwardly] we may pass a quiet and undisturbed life [and inwardly] a peaceable one in all godliness and reverence and seriousness in every way.”

1 Tim 2:1-2

(Amplified Bible)

A Prayer for the city's people: The common citizens and lowly ones within the city need prayer; prayer is extended to everyone. Our urban centers have endured this struggle and storm of cultural, economic, and political poverty far too long. Cities need lifting up by the power of prayer. The power of prayer, individual and corporate, can change many situations in people's lives and the communities. The power of prayer can change the inmate or ex-offender's life. The Apostle Paul even in his distress while in prison prayed and proclaimed that: *“for I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a*

criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.” (2 Tim 2:9, NASB) The author says a prayer: “because God lives in our city of urban brothers and sisters... Prayers are extended towards the people of the city’s happiness and joy in their newly discovered peace.”²⁰³

A Prayer for the city’s importunity: The constant plea of believers is not afforded rest. Insistently they pray for all that is contained within the city and its leaders in the church. It is believed that such “intent praying will bring a change in the church.”²⁰⁴

“For he was [waiting expectantly and confidently] looking forward to the city which has fixed and firm foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God.” (Heb. 11:10, AMP).

Shalom: A Wholeistic Vision For the Urban City

Dr. Eldin Villafañe opens the eyes to many readers and believers to the attitude in culture and a direction of peace (*shalom*). As Christians we must exist in the mindset of peace within ourselves, for humanity, the city and for the sustaining of church values and Christian doctrine. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity helps Christians incorporate the triune Godhead into our daily lives and in the church. The trinity is a living system in our everyday life because we rely upon the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for our guidance through faith and prayer.

Dr. Eldin Villafañe expresses in Seek the Peace of the City that “The Holy Spirit is central to the mission of the church in today’s urban world.”²⁰⁵ The Holy Spirit is the omnipotent power of God that conveys believers to Christ. The state of our urban societies has far too long been in a “cloudy haze” of brokenness. The people suffering

²⁰³ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 154.

²⁰⁴ Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, 155.

²⁰⁵ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, xiii.

from spiritual poverty find themselves lost, frustrated and confused and show difficulty in connecting with God. There are many occasions during our personal brokenness where God often meets us right where we are, and in seeking the Lord is where the sinner or ex-offender will find Christ. Dr. Villafañe expressed another quote that reads “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*”²⁰⁶ Prov. 29:18

Dr. Villafañe associates the Jeremiah Paradigm with the “New Jack City” story/movie. The New Jack City movie revealed the brokenness of an urban community that was plagued with poverty, violence, drug dealing enterprise, stealing, murder, drug addiction, crime of every aspect imaginable, sinful acts and hopelessness. The people in this slum city were severely impoverished, lacked hope, dreams and the Spirit of the Lord in their lives. Many of the residents did not have a positive vision of hope and shalom for themselves or the city. New Jack City revealed people who began to perish and destroy themselves in poverty. The physical and spiritual poverty were so bad that people exhibited no value for their lives or anyone else. It appears as though the people in “*New Jack City*” existed without souls. We live in a social culture that consists of many sub-cultures within the inner city. Within these social cultures there is a sense of brokenness/a mentality of the urban youth that is associated with the “New Jack City Syndrome” crisis.

One thing that must not be overlooked is the power and strength that emerges from within. The *Power of the Powerless* is a way of gaining strength through your brokenness. It is at the cross where we find salvation. In our powerless, poverty,

²⁰⁶ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 2.

brokenness and submissive state of being, we look to the cross for redemption, salvation and the power of God to show His grace and shalom.²⁰⁷

The wisdom and power of God is revealed in 1 Cor 1:24 “...*but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” (NASB)

The idea of the power of the powerless is a paradigm of partnership,
*“And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong,”*²⁰⁸

-----2 Cor 12: 9-10

(New American Standard Bible)

Dr. Eldin Villafañe’s “Jeremiah Paradigm” stems from the theological concept that is associated with three words relating to a theological context, mission, and spirituality (Presence, Peace and Prayer). The *presence*: is representative of the importance of the church and our relationship in the city, with culture and society (Jer. 29:5-6)... while *peace (shalom)*: relates to our mission in the city. When there is ‘true peace’ it speaks of wholeness, soundness, completeness, health, harmony, reconciliation, justice, personal and social welfare (Jer. 29:7a). The church is the instrument of peace in the city... and the *prayer* shows the spirituality needed to struggle and live in the city.

²⁰⁷ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 31.

²⁰⁸ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 29.

Within urban spirituality the importance of prayer is paramount to the struggles that require nurturing and caring for souls (Jer 29:7b).²⁰⁹

The church is the source for binding our Christianity, community and souls together. We look to the church to find our *shalom internally and externally*. Dr. Villafañe says: “The church gathers to worship and equip itself to impact the polis (a body of citizens). It does not live for itself, but for the kingdom (rule, sovereignty) of God. The church cannot be indifferent to the human needs in the city.”²¹⁰

Dr. Villafañe introduces the idea of “*Burning Patience*.” Burning Patience can refer to Hope and *Shalom* or peace with one’s self in the city and in the church. Burning Patience is a critical part of engaging in effective ministry within the cities that need hope. Burning patience is a way of meeting the needs of hope. Villafañe says: “The dark side of any city is hopelessness... ‘Burning patience’ says that urban ministry requires time, commitment, fervor to be ‘filled with Spirit’—for its long haul.”²¹¹ We learn that “*Burning Patience* is that quality of faith that is in any city—be it Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, or Boston – notwithstanding its complexity and confusion, its chaos and crime, its heart cries and challenges, can and must believe the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ makes a difference. It believes in the ‘now and not yet’ of the kingdom of God, one can believe in a city where there is comprehension and clarity, care and concern, consolation, justice, and love. In other words, there can be shalom --- peace, harmony, and wholeness with justice.”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 2-3.

²¹⁰ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 2-3.

²¹¹ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 45-46.

²¹² Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 44.

One can associate “burning patience” with the fruit of the Spirit that reveals a “measure of grace” that is found in what we call our splendid city. We know that our faith for the city will lead to a heavenly splendid city. With the trusting, believing and following the gospel, today will show a *shalom* that we have so long been waiting for in our splendid urban centers. Basically, in urban ministry we have to see “burning patience” as a measure of hope for our city that permits the Holy Spirit to reveal itself to us at the appropriate time... Burning patience is that moment of faith that permits one in the “now and not yet,” living with anticipation of the present age to come through hope.²¹³

Comparatively, one could view the “New Jack City” characteristics to any city in America and experience the same personal, social and spiritual poverty within that city. Much of these personal and social hardships within the city are contributing factors that have landed so many people in prison. For the ex-offender, returning to a similar “New Jack City” environment only magnifies his chances of recidivism.

Author Elijah Anderson says that one of the most disturbing issues within the urban community is when most white residents find difficulty in distinguishing people of color from those intending to commit a crime and those that are not.²¹⁴ Biases and stereotypes seem to get in the way when it relates to black people.

The Code Of The Street: Urban residents who grow up or reside in the inner-city adopt characteristics early on to learn the code of the streets and establish an awareness

²¹³ Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 45.

²¹⁴ Elijah Anderson. *Code of the Street*. (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), 17.

in the way of street survival. The urban experience of inner-city environments requires a survival-of-the-fittest mentality, mentally and physically.

When ex-offenders are released from prison or jail they still possess the street survival tendencies that they used to survive in prison, and unless some of those negative traits are abolished the ex-offender is likely to be a subject of recidivism and return back to prison. In order for ex-offenders to grow in their relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they will require a caring welcoming from the local church and its members. The church must develop a strong foundation for discipline, mentoring, nurturing and ministering to the ex-offender.

The Church's mission is to help ex-offenders make a positive and smooth transformation back into society by way of the gospel.

There is a great need for assisting the ex-offender in transitioning back into the community. The church must be in the forefront of this ministry call and lead the charge in ministering with and mentoring the newly released ex-offender. It is essential that a network of support and re-entry resources for ex-offenders exist, for without the assistance he/she is most likely to fail and at some point and return to prison. The efforts of a re-entry team of people are necessary to make this intervention a success. Upon the ex-offender's release he/she is usually lost and needs assistance or direction.

Ex-offenders can easily become frustrated when making decisions after their release. As they have been incarcerated for an extended period of time they become conditioned to take orders and direction from the prison guards, now that process challenges ex-offenders who have the freedom to make their own decisions. Ex-offenders require caring mentors to assist them in their needs. A welcoming church is

very necessary for the health, future and welfare of the ex-offender in keeping him/her on track, grounded in the Word of God and to help deter them from activity or behaviors that might land them back in prison again. It is the job of the church and mentors to make every effort possible in having the ex-offenders feel welcome in the church. Mentors are the safety net that is expected to assist the ex-offenders in making the least intimidating transition back into the community. When prisoners return home, as Christian mentors we must receive them with the love that God has instilled in us and provide the necessary support and resources.

Today, our neighborhoods are increasingly becoming more urban. From the outside looking inward, many would identify it as an impoverished community. There are diverse situations of poverty that exist within the urban community. Urban Social Characteristics (found in Definition of Terms section) describe some of the issues that exist in urban communities. There is poverty relating to being poor, economic poverty, spiritual poverty. In some communities poverty can encompass many if not all levels of poverty. We learn that “poverty is relational; where there is a network of relationships that affect poor communities from the core of poverty’s pain... The poor feel powerless when it comes to situations that bind them as captives. The situational relationships become a source of hurt for the poor and the oppressed because they are powerless to make a change for the better.”²¹⁵

Our thoughts, reality and the climate of change in our lives show a significant decline in the quality of life within our urban neighborhoods. Many Boston neighborhoods have been in a downward spiral with the sight of gangs, shootings, drugs

²¹⁵ Van Engen and Tiersma. *God So Loves the City*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994.), 198.

and violence that polluted our streets and threaten the safety of residents. Urban neighborhoods turning into “high crime” areas seems to be a normal conditions of what is called the urban community.

Redemptive Living System

And yet, communities that experience an impoverishment of spirit are the first to look to Christ’s redemption for hope! In that, we seek to obtain our relationship with Christ through faith and obedience to God’s word and plan. God paid the price of our redemption to Satan through Christ Jesus as a ransom for our sin. We learn that “redemption is at work when we confess and repent, receive Christ’s forgiveness, and exchange our death for his life.”²¹⁶ Redemptive Living occurs as we attempt to proclaim the good news of redemption through Christ. We exhibit Christian traits of redemption, humility, confessing sin in an effort to be the best that one can be day-by-day... As people enter a ministry with their humble spirit, God pours out His Spirit towards them... A genuine connection occurs when one humbly walks before God and then become the recipient of God’s blessing in return.²¹⁷

Redemptive Thinking: we become aware of our wrong thinking, we repent from our wrong mental models, and we learn to find a new way of thinking and acting that is better aligned with truth.²¹⁸ Redemptive thinking generates a change or transformation within a person after honest confession. With the process of redemption one confesses their sins, then forgiveness takes place, a spiritual cleansing and then a renewing of

²¹⁶ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 129.

²¹⁷ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 77.

²¹⁸ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 91.

one's spirit occurs. Honest confession is the most important component in the redemptive mental model. Redemptive Learning: we learn from our wrong actions and thinking and take the initiative to make a change or employ corrective measures.

Redemptive Mental Model: "Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations or images that influence the manner that we understand the world and how we take action... an inner understanding that tells us how to take action."²¹⁹ It is good that we are able to understand our poverty as it guides us to a redemptive ministry, redemptive living, redemptive activity, and the fruit that remains. The fruit that remains is God's blessings, love, grace and mercy that nourish our Spirit-filled lives. When we find our poverty, then we find a connective harmony with God. The following picture is an example of the Redemptive Method:

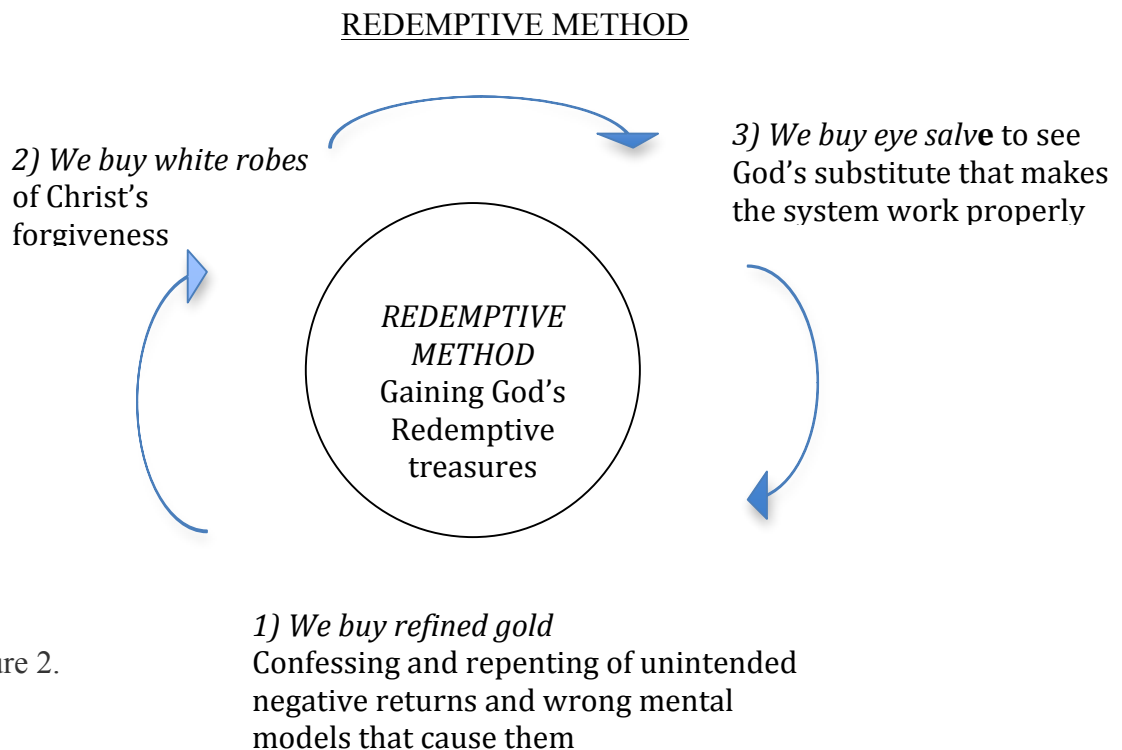


Figure 2.

²¹⁹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 89 (a direct quote from Peter Senge).

In the previous example in the “*Redemptive Method*” above, Jesus introduces three items that are considered “*redemptive treasures*.” Gold, white robes, and eye salve. The gold represents refined fire, a symbol of our confessions and repentance for doing wrong. The white robes show that we are forgiven for our sins. And, eye salve is realizing our redeemed vision so that we can receive God’s blessing.²²⁰

Dr. Hall directs his readers to the cross with his two dimensions of redemption, the “vertical and horizontal.” As we look at the direction of the vertical redemption idea we understand that the cross is pointed upward towards God, who controls all life and all redemption. God’s peace is pointed downward towards us. His Son, true God, came to be true Man in the world he had created, to be with us.²²¹ Now we look at the crosspiece, “horizontal redemption” reveals that redemption extends to our eternal destiny in heaven and to our lives and relationships with people in the world we live. The gift of forgiveness that God extends to us, we are expected to pass on the gift of forgiveness toward others.²²² Our mental models help us to understand our wrongs, the unintended negatives and allow us an opportunity to make corrections through redemptive model methods. Redemption and salvation are connected to one another.

So as we apply the *Redemptive Method* to the ex-offender we would look for him/her to first understand where they have gone wrong, honestly confess their sins, repent, seek forgiveness, become cleansed by the Holy Spirit and have a renewed self. After the fall, all of mankind has been born into a sinful world and because of this great

²²⁰ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 130.

²²¹ Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 132.

²²² Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster*, 132.

fall, we need redemptive living, thinking, and learning the redemptive method to direct our lives.

John the Baptist displayed his redemptive mental model in his moral reformation as he preached and encouraged others to confess their sins and make an act of repentance, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”* (Mat. 3:2, NASB).

It is emphasized in the Lord's word that God is calling for peace among all people in the city and throughout the land. The scriptures say:

“...For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high visit us, To SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace,” (Lk 1:76-79, NASB).

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful,” (Jn 14:27, NASB).

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world,” (Jn 16:33, NASB).

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful,” (Col 3:15, NASB).

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,” (Philip 4:7, NASB).

“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you,” (2 Cor 13:11, NASB).

God calls the church to pray for our cities. It is said that: “God’s primary intention for the city is to bring God’s kingdom into that city—to permeate its political, economic, and religious structures, to transform the lives of its inhabitants, to exorcise

evil and unrepentant principalities and powers, and to place over that city, not a brooding angel but a Christ who would gather the city to himself. It is God's intension to transform every city into the city of God by making of that city the embodiment of God's rule. God would seek to do this in every city by creating in that city a new community: the church."²²³

²²³ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.), 105.

CHAPTER FOUR

HEXAGONING PROCESS

This chapter will explore the methodologies and resources where the urban church can understand the dialog and culture of Living System Ministry and Mission with offenders and ex-offenders. The frame for this examination is described from the context of the *Hermeneutical Circle* that is reflected in the Social Ethics paradigm of Dr. Eldin Villafañe.²²⁴ This paradigm contains three components that are framed by three questions. The first question is Clarification (What is Going on?). The second is Conceptualization (What does the Bible and related sources say about the issue?), and the third is Confrontation (How are we going to respond to the issue?). Hermeneutics relates to the theory of interpreting text; the Hermeneutical Circle reflects the constant movement between a part and the whole of interpretation and understanding text.

Hermeneutical Circle of Social Ethics

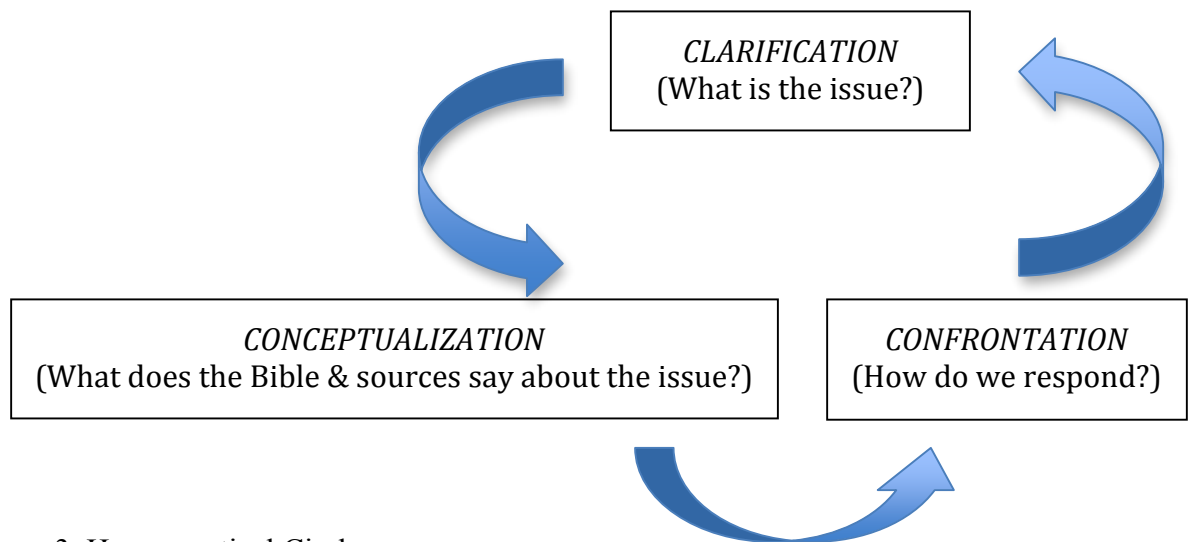


Figure 3. Hermeneutical Circle

²²⁴ Eldin Villafañe, *The Church in the City: Confronting Issues in Contemporary Urban Society*, Doctor of Ministry Residency III lectures, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Boston, CUME, June 15, 2012.

Chapter One within this thesis presents a view in the *Clarification* component of the issues concerning the current state of the ex-offenders in urban communities. It is an examination into What is going on? or What are the issue? This work seeks to identify and evaluate the ex-offender, incarceration rate, recidivism, reentry and the cultural divide affecting the urban communities in the United States.

The biblical/theological component of the *Conceptualization* piece seeks to call upon the church to take action and address this crisis that is hurting and destroying our communities and African American men. The over population of prisons housing an outrageous number of black men is a sad crisis that has been lingering too long. The many ex-offenders who are not prepared for re-entry back into society, most often become recidivist within two to three years after their release.

Now, the *Confrontation* begins. The confrontation component speaks to one of the questions in Chapter One of this thesis as it relates to the problems affecting ex-offenders: Are we doing enough in ministry? The response: As leaders in ministry we not only have a calling to do the work of the Lord but we also have an obligation to serve the Lord by helping others who might be in need. Today the church must incorporate the dynamics of living systems and systems thinking into their ministries in an effort to meet the needs within its diverse ministries. The church must respond by taking action. An understanding of these issue and finding solutions to fix the problem is of the utmost importance for addressing the needs of the urban community of ex-offenders and of delivering shalom within the community. Every church must be open and willing to help others with a nonjudgmental spirit when ministering to those who have fallen, are hurting or are broken. There is a need for the church to take a closer look

at how its ministry is evaluating and addressing the needs of its worshipers. All Living System Ministries and Mission practitioners are servants of the Lord and are required to minister to others who are in need as part of our Christian obligation to God and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Living System: The Hexagoning Process & Learning Team Step One

I began this thesis-project by using the Hexagoning Process. The Hexagon Process is a systems thinking tool that aids one in evaluating if there is a need for a ministry's intervention to exist. The Hexagon Process can be utilized in any subject matter that is desired. I used the Hexagon Process for this project in Christian ministry.

The process and purpose of hexagoning can serve as a needs assessment tool. The systems thinking hexagoning process is a very positive tool used when one decides to break down systems, analyze systems and improve a model for productivity output.

When conducting the feedback in the hexagoning process every participant must remain sensitive and respectful to the responses of others. The Hexagon Process is a tool to gather information that will ultimately address a need to be met. The Hexagon Process is like a huge puzzle with many pieces. You don't see the full effect of the "puzzle picture" until it is completed.

The two questions that I presented during this project involved questions:

Positive Questions: (1) What are the factors to achieve spiritual renewal in the church? (2) How can the church minister to urban ex-offenders, bring them to Christ and reduce the recidivism rate?

During my first residency I began with the question of "spiritual renewal" in the church. This appeared important because some churches that serve from a traditional

worship service can sometimes appear predominately routine and ritualistic. The spiritual renewal idea would open the door for a more diverse worship service that would incorporate generational and cultural gaps between worshipers. I guess this can be viewed as the infusion of traditional and contemporary worship service. I began thinking about the need to take a closer look at where a church ministry is and how the individual(s) and the church can improve in their outlook on serving to God and find spiritual renewal in the church.

Upon developing my thesis topic it was suggested by my pastor Reverend, Dr. Conley H. Hughes Jr. that I expand my topic to provide a better meaning toward my Doctoral work. At first, the thought of becoming involved in an ex-offender ministry took me by surprise that would place me out of my comfort zone. The other apprehension arose because for many years I have been on the law enforcement side of things within the urban community. When this ministry was introduced to me I wondered how I would make this unfamiliar transition. After some thought and suggestive encouragement from my pastor, I decided to welcome the idea, challenge and the opportunity while focusing my efforts, resources and research on developing this ex-offender ministry at Concord Baptist Church of Milton, MA. Now I have decided to expand my question and search for ways that the church can minister to ex-offenders while bringing them to Christ and reducing the recidivism rate.

Step Two: "Use Hexagoning with a Larger Group."

I began the first phase of my hexagon journey with the intensions of organizing a large group to look at the dynamics of system thinking with the influence of the hexagon

process. Hexagoning is a means for channeling and expanding the IQ of a single person to an infinite group IQ that will expose the diverse range of responses.

The first approach with the Hexagon Project I, I attempted to gather a group of approximately ten to twelve members from my church and set up a workshop to be held on a Saturday at the church or an alternative location at the Roxbury Boys & Girls Club. As I met with one of the leaders in the church to facilitate a workshop on Hexagon I was met with what I call resistance. At this time I became very disappointed with the insensitive spirit that was lurking in the mist at that time. This person did not care to understand that I had just finished my first residency two weeks prior and at the same time had a demanding work schedule. I struggled with someone not extending themselves to assist me in my D. Min studies, but when I asked for their help it seemed to be not important enough for others to lend a helping hand. After three failed attempts to organize a group I decided to get creative. My attempt with trying to coordinate dates at the Roxbury Boys & Girls Club along with people's schedules was unsuccessful and very exhaustive.

While frantic about meeting the deadlines for my D. Min Project, I sat down one day and began to brainstorm on how I could reach the objectives of the assignment. I decided that if I could not bring participants to a workshop to capture their ideas for my Hexagon Project I, then I would bring the workshop class to them and solicit their responses by email or by the internet. I developed a three-page document where I described the Hexagon Project I.

The first page of the document identified who I am and a brief summary of the System Thinking Hexagon Project was provided to describe what the hexagon process

was all about. The second page of the document provided examples/samples of one positive question and one negative question. Each answer to these questions provided an example phrase answer. It was explained that each question would require three responses each. The third page provided the actual questions that needed to be answered. I designed the three-page document so the participants would be able to type their responses in the appropriate hexagons boxes designed on the sheet and they were instructed to email the responses back to me ASAP. The entire response to answer both questions should have taken 6-10 minutes. Not all of the selected participants responded back to me.

However, I gathered enough participants to complete the assignment. My initial goal was to obtain a minimum of ten to twelve participants, and I have succeeded in this goal. During the first phase of the Hexagoning Process I was met with a number of challenges, but I was able to overcome dilemmas and press on with the assignment and obtain the results that I was seeking. Where one door shut before me I opened another to meet my goals and objectives.

The email approach proved to be somewhat successful with the soliciting of participants and their responses to the questions. However, there were some people who never responded at all, but weeks or months later they did acknowledge that they had received my email.

After capturing the responses from the participants, I had to take on the role of what would have been the workshop or class. My job was to Capture Ideas, Arrange Ideas and synthesize Ideas. The two questions that I introduced for Part I of my Hexagon Project appeared to be too general, so after speaking with Rev. Dr. Conley Hughes, it

was suggested that I explore a ministry that assisted church members who are ex-offenders and their families coping these challenges. While considering a second phase to my D. Min project I developed two additional questions and submitted them to Dr. Doug Hall and Professor Judy Hall for their review and permission to include them as a second component to my Hexagon Project. The second phase of the Hexagon Project II presents a specific or more tailored approach to a personal and ministry need. I know that by adding a second component to this Hexagon Project the demands for fulfilling the required goals will be tough, but will prove to be rewarding upon its development and completion.

Now, the second phase of my Hexagon journey with the Hexagon Project II focusing on ex-offenders and their families turned out to be challenging as well. It was not easy getting the cooperation from potential participants. I began the second phase of the Hexagon Project II by sitting down and making a list of names and email addresses of people I could contact as participants. I also reached out to an ex-coworker who had befriended me in the past and who is now a pastor in Boston to see if he and his church members would participate in a ministry workshop for my D. Min Project. This particular pastor told me that he would participate, and that he would encourage some of the members of his church and that I could use his house for a workshop gathering. I also sent this pastor a three page Hexagon Project II document that was similar to the Hexagon Project I document. It was two days prior to the workshop when the pastor canceled and said that he got no responses from his church members. This pastor never responded to the Hexagon Project II document to this date.

I gathered my group from participants who responded to my email of Hexagon Project II. When sending out the emails and attachments for Hexagon Project II, I sent emails to some of the previous participants in Hexagon Project I, but many of them did not respond. The process that I developed was that participants were provided with positive and negative sample questions and answers to help guide them on how they should respond to the actual real questions to be answered in the project. This process appeared to be straightforward from all of the responses that I received from the participants.

There were two or three minister participants that responded immediately, but there were others that ignored my appeal for their participation. As time of the deadline grew closer I became more and more frustrated with people, especially with Christians. I began to lose hope because it seemed as though the more I attempted to push forward, there were obstacles continuously popping up each day. I attended a ministers meeting and personally provided at least eight ministers with the Hexagon Project II document and requested their support and I did not receive a response. Now it was nearing a week before the deadline of the assignment and I still did not have the responses that I needed for the Hexagon Process.

One day I sat down and began to brainstorm and formulate my own answers in an effort to reach my goals and objectives of the project. I mentioned to my estranged daughter who was preparing for her college graduation that I was having a dilemma getting participants to answer two questions for my project. My daughter asked me to email the questions to her and within one hour I had four additional participants.

During different phases of this assignment I sought the assistance from my Professors Dr. Doug and Mrs. Judy Hall and mentors for more clarification and application of the Hexagon Process. During this learning experience I realized that when things did not go as planned that I had to take the next step to make things happen in order to reach my goals and objectives. I believe that collectively my participants fully took control/ownership of the questions that were presented and they provided some very good and surprising responses to the questions. Please see (Appendix A for Questions).

Step Three: Hexagoning Project

Positive “Process Of The Gospel” Causal Loop Diagram

Here in step three, I will describe how the group process is developed. In step two of the hexagon process I captured ideas from participants who had read the two focus questions: “What are the factors to achieve Spiritual Renewal in the Church?” And “What are the challenges/hindrances of empowering urban believers through Christian education in the Church?”

- 1) I have placed the hexagon variables into categories/topics. This process is called arranging ideas or clustering. After “capturing ideas” from the participants, I began arranging the hexagon responses/variables into groupings called clusters.
- 2) Name them descriptively in action phrases. The process of describing/labeling the arranged ideas is transformed into what is called “Synthesis Ideas.” In forming “synthesis ideas” the arranged ideas are labeled with an action phrase that describes a particular cluster or category. The “synthesis ideas” process produces the variables, groupings and the category headings/phrases.

This is the Hexagoning Project I – Synthesis Idea for Each Cluster

Grouping: What are the factors to achieve Spiritual Renewal in the Church?

A: A Life long Process of Establishing A Relationship With God...

- 34. Accepting God as our Lord and Savior.
- 2. By placing God first in all you do or seek to accomplish.
- 36. Focus on God not man.
- 5. The Word of God is the root and the continuous goal of the Church
- 6. The people must be “hearers” as well as “doers” of the Word of God.
- 8. The people must strive for the relationship that is ordained by scripture. “Love the Lord God.”
- 7. The people must desire and Love God.
- 9. Spiritual hunger and a commitment to seeing God.
- 4. Seeking the foundation and focus of the Church is the Word of God.
- 15. Set surrendering to God’s Will as a priority.
- 11. Openness to the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of revival and renewal.
- 28. Ministry Leaders who are strong in their faith and respectful to all members.

B: Availability of Cost and Resources for Ministry

- 20. Financial, tangible and intangible resources.

C: The Expression of Love and Respect for One Another through faith.

- 1. By having the courage to express Christian Love to a brother or sister in Christ.
- 3. Being able to listen to issues of others and provide methods to assist them.
- 12. Elements of the church programs that make the greatest Spiritual impact in the community.

13. Elements that could be missions outreach - focusing on the external elements of renewal.

D: Move beyond brokenness, to be transformed with continued prayer and meditation with God.

18. Transformed lives more like Christ.

35. By being a slave for His Kingdom Plans first.

10. (2 Chron. 7:14), The willingness to recognize our spiritual poverty and repent.

16. Accept responsibility for success and failure.

33. More time spent in reflection and prayer.

E: Fellowship Before the Lord.

19. Fellowship

21. Commitment of Church Elders and Parishioners.

29. Positive Church climate: New members feel a part of or connection to their new Church.

32. All ministries should be engaged in the effort with Biblical studies and activities that reflects the goal.

25. Everyone should share a single vision: Being on one accord.

27. Everyone brings one: reaching out to the community; expanding the vision.

24. An uplifting and relevant worship service.

14. Religious or Church revivals, focusing on the internal elements of renewal.

F: Teaching and Preaching the Word

31. Teaching and preaching that focus on Spiritual Renewal solely from a sound Biblical base.

30. Strong Church leadership to carry out the tenants of the faith and preach God's Word.

17. With obedience to the teachings of the Bible.

26. Consistent Bible Study with all groups aimed at the same lessons, through varied techniques.

22. A sound Biblical teaching and preaching Church.

23. With meaningful workshops, retreats and facilitators.

Observation: A: Life long Process – Establishing A Relationship With God...

Positive Regard: C: The Expression of Love and Respect for One Another through faith.

Relevant Communication: D: Move beyond brokenness, to be transformed with continued prayer and meditation with God.

Meeting Perceived Needs: B: Availability of Cost and Resources for Ministry

Meeting Basic Needs: E: Fellowship Before the Lord.

Multiplication: F: Teaching and Preaching the Word

Grouping: What are the challenges/hindrances of empowering urban believers through Christian education in the Church?

-A: No Relationship or time for God.

49. Absence of commitment to intimate personal relationship with Christ.

40. Time other than Sunday. Time is not set aside.

66. Not enough time spent in pursuit of God, self and prayer.

-B: No Unity and No Support

37. The lack of support from other leaders who are able to provide assistance.

60. Lack of coming together to brainstorm in order to achieve the same goal. Lack of unity.

45. Getting support and commitment from Church leadership.

63. When people are expected to pay a high conference fee to receive education.

55. Lack of commitment from the Church.

65. When fragmented ministries have their own agenda and are not linked to the “big picture” for the Church.

-C: Low Faith and Motivation

56. Poor Attendance.

54. Lack of consistent attendance of pupils and instructors.

47. Conditions that lead to a lack of participation on a long-term basis.

69. Lack of true believers.

-D: Lack of Christian Education Resources

46. Lack of available resources and lessons by participants as relevant to issues they encounter on a daily basis.

53. Lack of appropriate and consistent educational curriculum.

57. Lack of offering constructive studies, workshops that are all in the same time frame: Pitting one against the other.

61. Inconsistencies when church education is offered.

62. Lack of diversity of classes offered to people in different phases of their “Christian Walk.”

-E: No Clear Prioritized Direction for Christian Education

48. The absence of Effective Christian Education, creativeness that addresses

participants: “where they live.”

51. Christian Education not seen as a clear priority.

50. No clear connection between Bible study opportunities and personal empowerment.

44. Finding competent teachers within the Church to make it interesting.

42. Programs often feel insincere when offered in the urban setting. “Appears like a gimmick.”

64. When teaching and preaching has no focus or direction for the congregation.

-F: Selfish & Dysfunctional Christian Environment

38. “Selfishness” One having a self-fulfilling agenda. They are only concerned with their own ministry and not others ministry.

58. “My way is the best way” attitude.

41. “The cares of the world” - keeps people from making it a priority in their daily lives.

39. Dysfunctional attitudes will promote challenges in empowering Urban Believers through Christian education.

68. We have some “Soap Opera” moments (gossip) from individuals attending Church.

43. Negative attitudes about the value of Christian Education.

52. Unqualified Instructors.

59. Planning an event during the same time as yours, “I’m more important..!”

67. Ministries help & hurt by asking for too much time.

70. When believers aren’t just learning rules and laws ordered by the church

leader who has no interest in God's vision and plans. Must be God focused.

- 3) After careful examination of the variables and their labeled clusters I began to see how the topics lined up with the Process of the Gospel paradigm.

Explain how far you progressed at the large group event and explain what problems developed.

- 1) Did you re-adjust any of the variables into differing topics?

Yes I did readjust some of the variables and into differing topics after I adjusted some topics in an effort to properly organize the diagram.

- 2) Did you do this alone or with a small group?

Yes, I conducted segments of the project alone. It was difficult to capture the participant's time and interaction for the assignment.

- 3) Describe that process and the participants.

The process of this assignment was very difficult because of the lack of participation from participants. Participants are needed for the purpose of providing answers/variables to the questions and they are needed for additional feedback responses throughout the Hexagoning Process.

- 4) Describe how your group did this process.

I as the group feel I did very well considering the process of improvising and using what was available at the time (me).

- 5) If your group did not get to this point, describe how you achieved this goal.

I placed myself in the position of the group in order to achieve the goals.

This page will display the Process of the Gospel Causal-Loop Diagram:

Hexagon Project I

The Process of the Gospel Paradigm

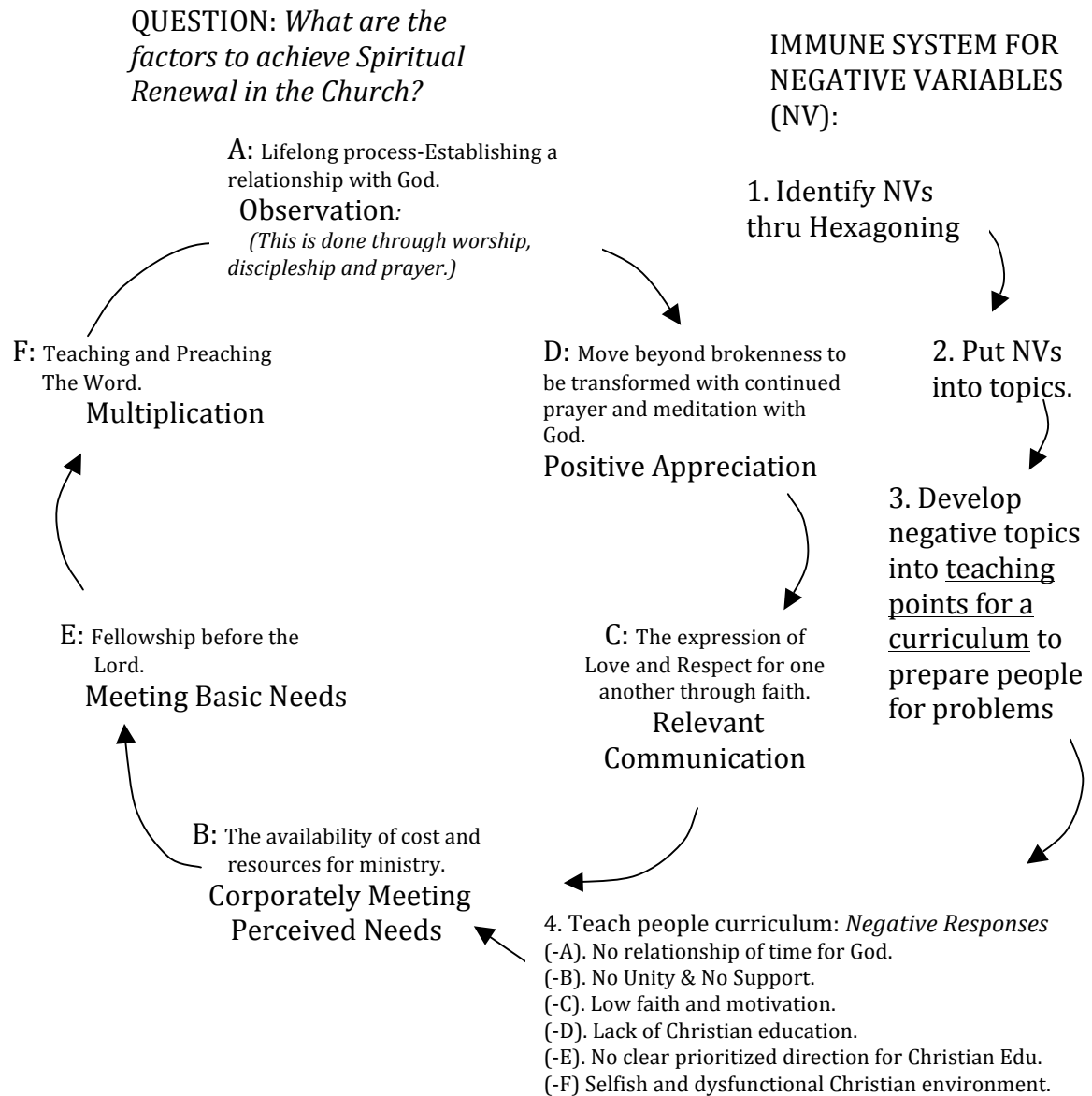


Figure 4. Causal Loop Diagram

Grouping: [Positive Focus Question:]

How can the Church minister to urban ex-offenders; bring them to Christ and reduce the recidivism rate?

Cluster: A Connecting with God and Discipleship.

46. Teach the ex-offender how to pray, understand the Bible through Bible Study.

47. Teach how to live and walk in the Word of God.

39. Church must provide Discipleship support to ex-cons.

11. Teach Forgiveness.

17. Be mindful: Scriptures teaches "...for we have all sinned and fallen short of God's goodness, he who is without sin, cast the first stone.

40. Church must provide mentoring and ministerial support.

49. Tell the ex-con who God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is.

50. Provide the ex-con with his/her own Study Bible and encourage their personal relationship with God.

25. Show ex-convicts that they are people; we love and care for them; not only on Sunday, but every day of the week.

5. Have programs (Ministries) to address the issue of reconnecting with God.

Cluster: B Self-Education for Mentors and Outreach.

9. Transitional Ministers exposed to a Church for commitment: Christian friends and family need a prayer warrior.

8. Prison Ministry: Special Trained Ministers for ex-convicts on the inside needing normalization prior to being released (Reformed Christians).

7. Proactive: Special Trained Ministers for individual and family issues.

18. Examine our personal feelings; there might be crime in our past that is triggered by ministering to others.

19. Church leaders need to be educated in aspects of law & judicial process to understand the limitations of ministering to ex-convicts.

Cluster: C Promoting a Safe Environment in Ministry for Leadership and people in crisis.

32. First lead by example. Next find them and spend time talking with them about the church.

41. Church must be willing to listen to the concerns of the ex-con.

2. Create an environment suited for the ex-convict.

42. The Church and members must be honest, respectful and truthful with the ex-offender.

37. Church must provide a safe environment for ex-cons from scrutiny/harassment.

28. Have a brunch/lunch where ex-con can tell their story: overcoming battles with the help of the church.

36. Church must provide a safe environment for other worshipers.

4. Ensure the environment exists in the Church that does not judge someone's past.

3. The ministers should not judge the ex-convicts on past deeds.

16. Church members must be opened minded: Remind ourselves not to sit in judgment of others.

10. Demonstrate total acceptance.

35. Church is willing to provide a second chance to ex-cons who seek Christ.

Cluster: D Reaching Out Beyond the Walls of the Church.

15. Encourage through fellowship, opportunities, mentoring and being a role model.
6. Have programs (Ministries) that give ex-convicts a sense of purpose combined with their new “Christian Walk.”
26. Create a dedication program where they get involved in the community through the church.
27. Ministers publically speak at jails/prisons to provide a positive outlook for ex-offenders.
30. Outreach: Go to the jails before they get released.
23. Create different focus groups that cater to ex-offender.
20. Establish an on-going street ministry.
21. To be a part of a structured Church men’s group/women’s group.
48. Church to provide opportunities that deter ex-offenders from recidivism.

Cluster: E Using Resources for Development and Growth.

38. Church must provide resources: (Counseling, referrals, outreach) to assist ex-offender in their transition.
43. Members of the Church offering assistance and support.
44. Church can assist in locating housing.
12. Provide financial assistance for educational and vocational training/trade.
29. Establish prevention groups.
45. Church to teach basic domestic and personal skills.
34. Get them community work through the Church; pray with them and for them.
13. Provide assistance for physical needs (shelter, food and clothing).

- 31. Establish a Christian “Half way” house.
- 24. Have a hotline number where an ex-offenders can call when they feel a relapse or bad behavior emerging.
- 22. Develop a ministry that addresses/assist in job placement.
- 14. Offer job opportunities for job training and mentoring.
- 33. Get them into Church and provide counseling.

Observation:

A: Connecting with God and Discipleship.

Positive Regard:

C: Promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis.

Relevant Communication: C & D: Promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis. Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church.

Meeting Perceived Needs: D: Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church.

Meeting Basic Needs: B: Self-education for mentors and outreach.

Multiplication: E: Using resources for development and growth.

Grouping (-): [Negative Focus Question:]

What are some of the circumstances that might hinder Christian Ministry Outreach to the ex-offender in the urban Church community?

Cluster (-) A: An Unsafe Environment Leads to Fear and Lack of Trust

57. Concerns that the ex-offenders is tempted to commit a crime in a wealthy church.

58. Emotionally unstable ex-offenders will hinder efforts of Christian Outreach Ministry.

59. Church cannot allow the ex-con to work in certain ministries bases on their past criminal history (sexual offender).

92. The seriousness of the ex-cons past offences can hinder Christian Outreach.

52. Ex-offender using the ministry efforts for illegal activity.

73. Fear of ex-offender.

71. Ex-offenders who are known to the community and the church cause alarm for victims and residents who worship at the same church.

54. By lack of trust toward the ex-offender.

56. Concerns that the ex-con has not truly changed their ways from criminal activity.

93. The ex-offender continued involvement with criminal activity.

100. Continued Substance Abuse.

Cluster (-) B: Negative Attitudes & Judgment turns people away from Christ

75. Not identifying with the ex-offenders struggle.

76. Being judged in a negative light by the church community.

77. Fear of not being accepted in the church.

78. Lack of support from the church; feeling no relation or connection.

64. Being an unwelcoming community.

80. Propaganda/negative stereotypes associated with convicts.

63. Treating the individual (s) as an outcast.

82. Being belittled by negative company/crowd they keep.

85. Fear of negative judgment from the church.

86. People inside/outside of the church are judgmental.

53. Racism – efforts that maintain stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos.

90. Bias attitudes will hinder a Christian Ministry and the ex-cons Spiritual growth.

62. Not being friendly.

88. Negative attitudes projected from churchgoers.

Cluster (-) C: An Unclear Purpose/No Seeds to Plant.

87. People not leading by example.

70. The Church not having a positive image when reaching outside of its four walls.

Cluster (-) D: Failure to Include God as the Primary source in all you do.

61. No Prayer: no groups to keep in touch with ex-offender and their problems.

84. Lack of religious knowledge.

Cluster (-) E: Inadequate Resources Cause Disconnect/No Hope for the Future.

99. Lack of support.

94. Lack of education can hinder ex-cons future endeavors.

101. Lack of employment.

102. The absence of Christian involvement and love.

66. Inadequate resources to provide meaningful assistance.

104. Lack of money.

65. Not addressing the Spiritual and Emotional needs of the ex-offender.

67. An unwelcoming congregation with intolerance & lack of knowledge of God's Word.

68. Insufficient volunteers to provide mentoring.

91. Lack of opportunity will hinder growth.

55. A hindrance for the ex-offender exists through CORI record check when seeking employment.

72. Lack of available funding in the church.

74. Lack of commitment and resources.

60. Church not being proactive with known family crisis and no resources to help with family issues.

51. Church Ministry Outreach hindered by those who believe their efforts would be a waste of time or money.

Cluster (-) F: Brokenness in the Wilderness.

98. Frustrations in life.

97. The lack of will.

103. Lack of faith.

105. Unwilling to sacrifice his/her life to the Lord.

106. Refuse to establish a relationship with God.

83. Low self-esteem or shame.

79. Thinking or feeling embarrassed.

81. Feeling that God could never forgive for sinful things that they have done.

95. The lack of courage to engage in the ministry of the church.

69. Ex-offenders lack faith and trust in the church.

96. The inability to adjust to the outside world due to long-term incarceration.

89. Not being given a second chance to do what is right.

Part (II) The Second Phase of the Positive Causal Loop Diagram

QUESTION: *How can the Church minister to ex-offenders; bring them to Christ and reduce recidivism rate?*

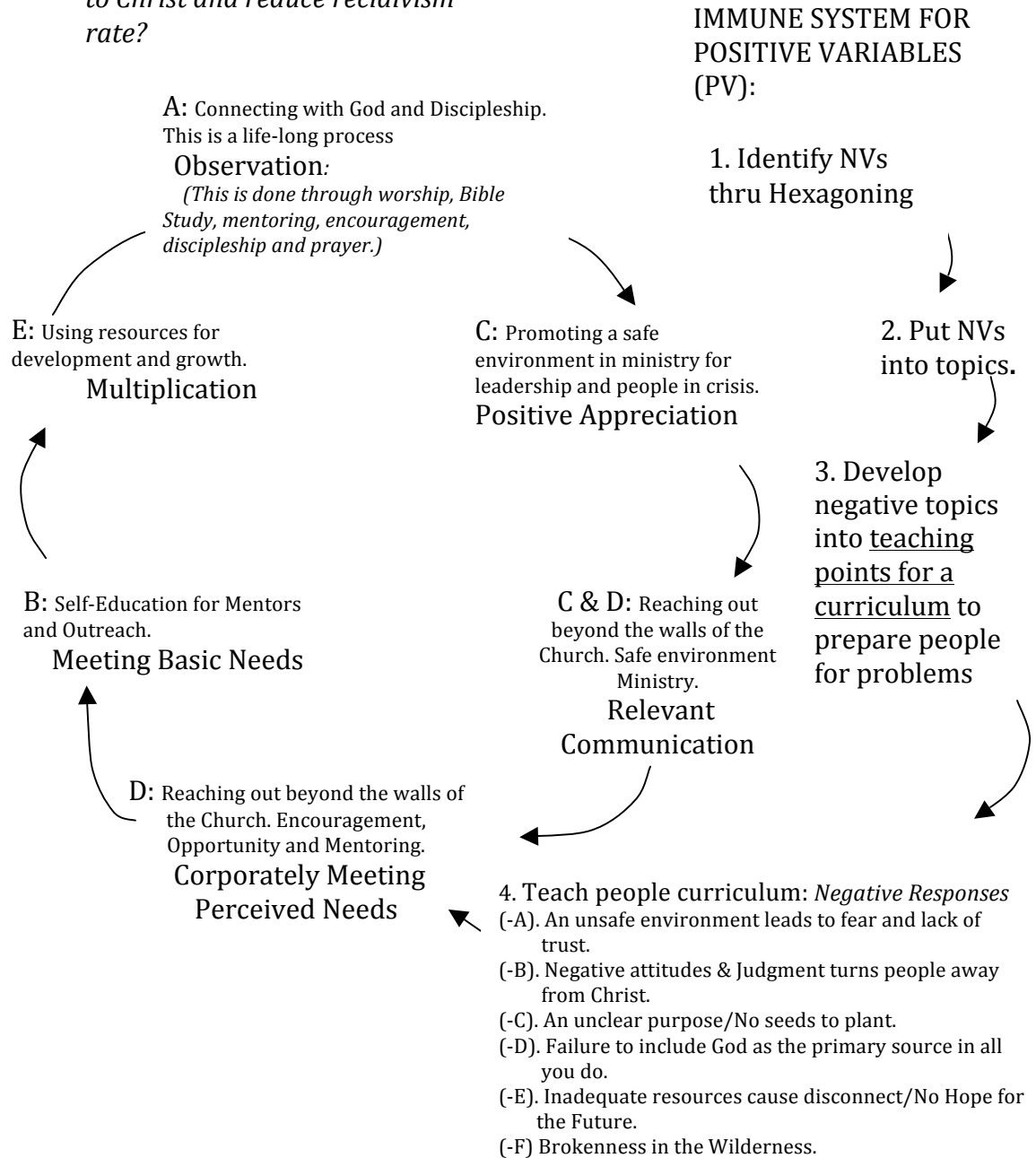


Figure 5. Causal Loop Diagram

During much of the Hexagon Projects I and II, I became the large group event. I had no choice but to become the group in order to complete the assignment. One of the problems of not having a large group in front of you is that you cannot obtain live feedback and responses that encourage additional elaboration. Another problem that exists is that the Story of the Gospel is not told to the large group.

The process of Hexagoning reminds me of the Creation from the beginning stages to the end. It is very ironic that this Residency One Urban D. Min Project has seven steps. In the Book of Genesis the world was created in six days and then there was rest on the seventh day. Within this Hexagon assignment there are six phases that need to be developed in order to reach the Gospel Story Narrative, and the seventh step prescribes reflection and rest.

Upon submitting the results of my Hexagon Project to Dr. Doug and Mrs. Judy Hall, I was informed that I had documented too many “synthesis” or categories in order to arrange them into the Process of the Gospel Causal Loop Diagram. As a result of having too many categories, I had to make some changes to the positive categories and some of the variables so that they would fit and flow with the Process of the Gospel in the Causal Loop Diagram. After the adjustments were made to the Loop Diagram everything blended fine in preparation to tell the Gospel Story. The correction process was conducted as I represented the large group.

Step Four: Writing the “Process of the Gospel Causal Loop Story.”

Here are the headings that will tell the Positive Process of the Gospel Loop Story.

[Positive Focus Question]

“What are the factors to achieve Spiritual Renewal in the Church?”

Hexagon Project I

Observation: A: Life long Process – Establishing A Relationship With God...

When I think about the observation aspect in this Gospel story I see that the relationship with God must become foundational. There should be nothing that severs the relationship of knowing who God is at all times. Every waking moment should be devoted to God. God is worthy to be praised, honored, worshiped and loved. A major part of establishing a relationship with God is knowing who the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are and how the three became one in themselves within the Triune Godhead and one within each believer. You establish a relationship with God through your own desire and love. You stay connected with God by faith, Bible Study, and ministerial support.

Positive Regard: C: The Expression of Love and Respect for One Another through faith.

Christians who are walking in the Spirit of Christ must express God's grace through love and respect toward others by the truth of God's Word. Christians must be willing to listen to others who are in pain, their brokenness, grievances, sorrow, joys and testimonies. Christians must always stand firm in their faith and encourage others to love one another, respect others and diligently pursue the riches of God's glory through His Word.

Relevant Communication: D: Move beyond brokenness, to be transformed with continued prayer and meditation with God.

There are many believers and non-believers who come before the Lord during their season of brokenness. The ways that we bring people out of the wilderness and out of the "depths of darkness" is by faith, prayer and hearing the Word of God. We must develop an environment for prayer and worship so that we may transform ourselves to walk in the light of the spirit like Christ.

Meeting Perceived Needs: B: Availability of Cost and Resources for Ministry.

With any task to be performed there is cost and resources that are needed to aid others. Often the work of the Lord is not exempt from the demands and needs that emerge. Within ministry we must perceive that there is a continuous need for resources to meet the needs in ministering to others. Sometimes the blessings of financial and tangible resources emerge from donations, fund raising or by the Church budget. The Lord will make or provide a way for His work to be done in ministry while we strive to serve His Holy Kingdom and Will.

Meeting Basic Needs: E: Fellowship Before the Lord.

We learn that the act of fellowshiping before the Lord is to break bread and engage in prayer. Table Fellowship is a sign of solidarity and friendship. The basic needs of the Lord are for all believers to place Him first in their lives. Prayer, spiritual mediation, Bible Study and the devotion to the Lord will allow you to enjoy fellowshiping before the Lord. One of the old hymnals reminds us of: "What A Friend We Have In Jesus." It is a basic need for us to maintain our friendship with the Lord. All believers, old members, new members, visitors and friends should feel comfortable and connected to the Church. There is one Christian policy in the Church where I attend,

“You come as a guest, but you leave as a friend.” Welcome others into the house of the Lord.

Multiplication: F: Teaching and Preaching the Word.

Leadership must carry the torch of the Word of God to the people. People are seeking to be fed their daily bread through the Word of God. The Holy Bible is the greatest book of life that we have as a guideline or source to live by. The Bible talks about the creation of the universe, all the living creatures, God’s love, grace, promise, and Commands. The Bible teaches mankind how to live as Christians and be Christ-like in nature. Teaching and Preaching goes beyond the pulpit and emerges into workshops, classrooms, and during Bible Studies.

Here is the heading that will tell the Positive Process of the Gospel Loop Story.

Hexagon Project II

Grouping: [Positive Focus Question:]

How can the Church minister to urban ex-offenders; bring them to Christ and reduce the recidivism rate?

Observation: A: Connecting with God and Discipleship. Ministry and leadership should use the wide lens/scope approach when making connecting with ex-cons who are in need or others who may be in crisis. Ministries must be willing to be positive examples to those who appear weak in some circumstances. Leaders must be equipped to teach and preach the Word of God. The application of the Bible and discipleship is one source for keeping one connected with God.

Positive Regard: C: Promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis. In order to reach the ministry goals that emerge before us, there is the importance of establishing and maintaining a safe environment for everyone. A safe environment means having concerns about ethical issues, confidentiality issues, fear, physical safety, feeling free to express one's self, and feeling safe from any bias or preconceived notions. A safe environment must be transformed into a Christian embracing environment. A safe environment must promote positive results. Sometimes there are outside sources that on occasion will have to intervene to make an environment safe. The Church must be a safe place for worship and prayer.

Relevant Communication: C & D: Promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis. Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church.

There must exist relevant/meaningful communication from leadership to people in crisis. There must be two-way communication between ministry leaders, individuals in crisis and their family. Communicating effectively is crucial in outreach ministry. Ministries reaching out to people must be encouraging and not intrusive. There are some religious groups that go out and attack people with religion and tend to drive some away from getting to know Christ. Leaders should be willing to preach & teach the Bible, encourage learning, promote revivals and meet some people where they are and bring them to where they need to be, with Christ.

Meeting Perceived Needs: D: Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church.

In order to meet some of the perceived needs ministries will have to venture out into the communities, schools, jails, prisons, neighborhoods, playgrounds and courtrooms in an effort to save the people who can be saved. All that God ask is that we

who are leaders, Christians and concerned citizens of God's Holy Kingdom is to love one another and help those who are in need by reaching out and extending the hand of grace. Meeting the perceived needs also requires role models, peer mentoring, and Christian/educational/and employment opportunities.

Meeting Basic Needs: B: Self-education for mentors and outreach.

Ministers and leaders must be trained in diverse issues so that they can be transitioned to a wider range of reaching out to address a need. It is the specialized leadership training that will provide adequate care and counseling that one needs. Ministries in the church should become a scaled down representation of a city which needs to render aid to its citizens. There are basic needs that need to be met, such as food, shelter, water, medical care, health care, mental health, education and spiritual healing.

Multiplication: E: Using resources for development and growth.

In ministry we must learn to repeat the process of teaching and preaching the Word of God to maintain our Christian growth and relationship with God. We must recycle our minds to receive God. The multiplication process requires ministry to continue to do what it has been doing over and over again to reach out to the people. Providing quality of life resources for counseling, referrals, training, jobs and housing to people who are in need can improve individual development and growth.

In the Hexagon Project II the Biblical parallels that I see relating to the Process of the Gospel Causal Loop Story first begin with the creation in the Observation category. Observation: A: Connecting with God and Discipleship. God reveals Himself to us through the creation; *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,"*

(Gen. 1: 1). Then “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them,” (Gen. 1: 27). During the ministry of Jesus He began to call His disciples and “while walking along the Sea of Galilee He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting their net into the lake, for they were fisherman. “Come follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men, (Matt. 4: 18-19).

The Lord is our protector... We must look to the Lord for safety.

Positive Regard: C: *Looks at promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis (Ps 12: 5).*

Relevant Communication: C & D: Promoting a safe environment in ministry for leadership and people in crisis. Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church. *(Matt. 7: 1-2), speaks about not judging others.*

Meeting Perceived Needs: D: *Reaching out beyond the walls of the Church. (Matt. 4: 17, Jesus begins to preach). Luke 22: 39, says pray so that you do not fall into temptation. Matt. 5: 1-12, Beatitudes.*

Meeting Basic Needs: B: Self-education for mentors and outreach. *(Acts 1: 1-3).*

Multiplication: E: Using resources for development and growth. *(Matt. 7: 24-25).*

How was this process conducted?

I wrote this process alone because of the lack of availability and lack of cooperation from participants. The time and willingness of the participants makes this process flow a lot smoother. In the absence of people's input and capturing variables this becomes a very difficult and almost impossible task. Due to the dilemmas that I encountered, I was forced to improvise in order to obtain my results for the project.

Step Five: Form Teaching points & a rudimentary curriculum from negative categories.

During the Hexagon Process I captured and arranged the negative variables in a similar method as I did for the positive variables. First I obtained the variables and then I placed them into separate groupings/clusters. After arranging the negative clusters I alphabetized each cluster and I named them with action phrases that were suitable for each cluster. I conducted this phase of the project in an effort to meet the goals and objectives of completing this assignment.

Thinking through the negative category topics and developing simplified teaching points.

At the beginning of this process there must exist the attention to tailor each category into a simplified teaching point. First we look at the *Hexagon I category (-A)* and see that the action phrase says “No Relationship or Time for God.” I would first approach this topic by asking the question of why is there no relationship or time for God. Second, I would look at how one could begin to develop a relationship with God. A curriculum for this topic would first have to introduce prayer and the Holy Bible. The seeker of the Word can be taught who God is by exposing him/her to each chapter of the Bible verse by verse. I believe that if a student is fed the Word in small pieces and then the application of God’s Word is applied to a living situation, this is where a person can best grasp the process of establishing a relationship and time for God. Seekers and believers who are hungry at the door need to be let in and fed the Word of God. Often in Jesus’ ministry, when He journeyed from one city to another, He spoke, taught and preached in parables so that the people could understand His message.

Hexagon Project I

[Negative Focus Question:]

What are the challenges/hindrances of empowering urban believers through Christian education in the Church?

Teach people curriculum: I believe during the preparation of any teaching curriculum a teacher or leader should develop questions that relate to the topic to aid in the guidance of meeting the objective of the topic and the student. The questions need to be asked in order to start the process. Sometimes we have to ask the How and the Why in order locate a direction to pursue.

(-A). No relationship or time for God. (Why is there no relationship and time for God?

How do we develop a relationship and time with God?

(-B). No Unity & No Support.

Why is there no unity and support? How do we develop unity and support?

People can be placed into groups or pared up with a mentor/leader to provide unity and support in learning, praying and spiritual support.

(-C). Low faith and motivation. (Why and How) The curriculum would promote, motivate and encourage one to believe the Word of God.

(-D). Lack of Christian education. (Why and What) can be done to provide Christian education to people)?

(-E). No clear prioritized direction for Christian Education.

(-F) Selfish and dysfunctional Christian environment. For the selfish and dysfunctional Christian - there need to be dialog, protocol and boundaries set in any environment of ministry. Zero tolerance for negative behavior. Negative behaviors will only create an

unhealthy environment for engaging and extracting beneficial dialog. Negative behavior becomes a major distraction and created barriers to healthy communication.

Hexagon Project II

[Negative Focus Question:]

What are some of the circumstances that might hinder Christian Ministry Outreach to the ex-offender in the urban Church community?

(-A). An unsafe environment leads to fear and lack of trust. (How can we establish a safe environment)? Developing a safe environment might require a church to consider building security, personal security when attending or leaving the premises and establishing a safe environment for women and children.

(-B). Negative attitudes & Judgment turns people away from Christ. (How can we establish a safe environment)?

(-C). An unclear purpose/No seeds to plant.

(-D). Failure to include God as the primary source in all you do. (“In the beginning,” we must always put God first in all we do.”)

(-E). Inadequate resources cause disconnect/No Hope for the Future.

(-F) Brokenness in the Wilderness. (What can be done to deliver one from brokenness?)

What resources are best suited to help the needs of this person?

With any curriculum there has to be goals and objectives already set in motion before you can attempt to minister to anyone. I believe that a careful assessment to understand the need and how to approach the crisis is the most appropriate course of action. Then based on the assessment you can begin to develop the appropriate questions that will serve as a guide/outline to reach the goals of the perceived/anticipated needs.

During this phase of this project I engaged in this process alone because of a lack of participation from respondents.

Step Six: Results of Steps 4 & 5 for final feedback.

During the process of Step Six I was unable to present “Grandma’s” story to the larger group because I obtained the variables or responses from participants via email. My initial attempts to gather participants for a workshop were unsuccessful. In the beginning the entire Hexagon Process appeared to be confusing. However, after I was able to break down the variables and place them into categories, I began to see how the story and the process were coming together.

The teaching points help with really looking at where there are weaknesses in ministry. Teaching points let leaders and Church ministries know who is starving for a personal and ministry need. Due to the lack of physical/workshop participation, I believe that the participants missed out on the Gospel Story and God being revealed through the Hexagon Process.

Feedback and Reflections On the Hexagoning Process

Step Seven: Reflections & Personal Conclusions on Potential Implementation.

Finally, I have emerged at this place where I can offer my personal reflection, and conclusions on the Hexagoning technique and analysis/reflection process. There were some difficulties, surprises, barriers/roadblocks that emerged, but each encounter was resolved. During the beginning/planning stages of the Hexagoning process I felt intimidated by the thought of how to approach the goals and objective of the assignment. Within the first residency class students participated as a group in taking on the challenge of the Hexagoning Process. During the class the Hexagoning Process appeared

so clear. However, after the first residency classes' the students were required to facilitate and engage in the Hexagoning Process on their own. As I began to tackle the Hexagon assignment, at times I found myself unclear on how to proceed to the next step. After continuous review of my notes I was able to grasp the concept of the Hexagoning Process and proceed forward to accomplish the goals and objectives of the assignment.

One of the problems of not having a large group in front of you is that you cannot obtain live feedback and responses that encourages additional elaboration from the participants. Another problem that exists is that the Story of the Gospel is not told to the large group.

I can remember early stages of reading and learning about systems thinking when Jay Forrester described systems thinking as a complex system. A system or a process becomes complex by not having complete cooperation from others. With systems thinking you need the wheel, sprocket and chain in order to get things moving.

Tell about how it felt to work with a team of others v. working alone and in a “top-down” fashion.

Unfortunately, I did not receive the experience of working with a team or others. Due to the lack of physical participation in a workshop I was unable to personally meet with participants face to face. From a “top-down” fashion I have had to become the leader in accomplishing this task. Working alone presented some freedoms of focusing on the assignment, but there was also the dilemma of not having the additional people for support or extended participation. The solo position that I had to adapt to caused a limited amount of responses from the participants. It would have been very beneficial

for the project and me if I had live participants. Working in a “top-down” fashion forced me to take control of the project and see it through to the end. Often when working in a group we take for granted the importance of each components of a project because we have others focusing on a specific piece of the project. We rely on team members to help put all the pieces together in order to complete the project. Working from the “top-down” fashion automatically placed me in a position of leadership. It became my responsibility to develop, coordinate and finalize the project.

The benefits of working alone allowed me to engage in this project at my own pace. I did not have to worry about meeting up with the challenges of someone else’s schedule. Working alone provided a way for me to digest and understand each component of the project. I believe that working alone is a more difficult and challenging task, but it provided me with the freedom of being self-directed and self-motivated. Working alone requires discipline in order to reach the desired results. The more I became involved in the project the more I learned. I have learned that the Systems Thinking Hexagoning Process is a very positive tool when you are breaking down systems, analyzing systems and improving the model for productivity output. However, if utilized in the wrong manner “Systems Thinking” and “Hexagoning” can become a dangerous device if the information that is obtained from the feedback is used in a negative manner. Sometime responses are of a sensitive nature and that needs to be respected.

What proved to be the most exciting aspect in the totality of the process?

During this exercise the most exciting aspect within the totality of the process was the Synthesis Ideas component because this is where I was able to take a step back

and view how the variables were associated with each group heading and get a real sense of how strongly it impacted a distinct cluster/grouping. The next exciting part was seeing how this entire process was developed into a Gospel Story with a visual diagram that displays the positive and negative variables along with a teaching/learning component. The Hexagon Process reminds me of a huge puzzle with many pieces. You don't see the full affect of the puzzle picture until it is completed.

I would say that the final most exciting aspect in the total process was learning a new way of Systems Thinking through the Hexagon Process. If I were never introduced to this concept then I would not have been able to expand my mind/IQ and the IQ of others in order to reach the results that I was able to reach within this project. I must say that one exciting aspect in this process is the devotion and grace that Dr. Doug and Judy Hall have placed on teaching these new concepts about Systems Thinking and Hexagoning. Hexagoning provides an exciting way of thinking and processing information to obtain results for systems, organizational structures and ministries.

As I think about ways to begin any ministry that is developed as a result of the Hexagon Process, I would look for strategies to Multiply and expand the ministry as positive developments emerge each day. I like how Dr. Hall spoke about multiplication in his book, *The Cat & the Toaster*: "We believe that God can change things... Transplanting a vision and implanting a construct will yield returns of multiplied productivity that can make possible percentage change in an entire system over the long term. Through living system ministry, we discover "the fruit that remains" and the fruit that multiplies. Multiplication is the natural outcome of living system ministry."²²⁵

²²⁵ Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat & the Toaster* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 246-247.

Tell how doing this project has given a sense of clarification on how I might implement the actual effort of the vision of the project.

While I became more and more engaged within the process of this project, issues appeared to be getting clearer. Step by step I began to associate the variables and their headings, and where they best fit in the Hexagon Process. Now that I have a clear sense of how to utilize the Hexagon Process as a tool, I feel that I can take just about any situation or topic and develop a positive and negative result. The results will provide me with the necessary information to conduct an evaluation of a situation. Hexagoning is fun, challenging and time consuming.

I feel that this project is a doable ministry, but this task cannot be conducted or maintained by one person. Re-entry/Ex-offender Ministry and Outreach Prison Ministry requires a large network of resources, leaders and people to meet the objectives or goals of the ministry. With the clarification that Hexagoning has provided for me I can envision the implementation of a project that will be discussed later in Chapter Five of this document.

I can remember many years ago when I was singing in the Gartheania Beal choir. One thing that everyone had to take part in at the beginning of every rehearsal was to say a Bible verse. Reading a Bible verse helps stay connected with God, Scripture and the Bible. Group Scripture reading helps the new believer become engaged with interacting with God. I believe that the Bible verse approach will be less intimidating to the new believer. I believe that God reaches mankind in many ways. We must become open to receive what God has to offer. God shares His love, grace and mercy to all. My vision of implementing this project would begin with a small group, in a slow fashion

and gradually build as time continues. I believe that some ministries are more effective when they come from a small or one-on-one focus. Over time someone else is added to the ministry support group, where resources are combined with the overall efforts of the ministry.

In conclusion, the framework for this chapter is supported by aspects of the Hermeneutical Circle (Clarification, Conceptualization and Confrontation). The Hermeneutical Circle introduced by Dr. Eldin Villafañe to students during our residency studies is used in understanding and analyzing What is going on? What the Bible says? and What action will follow? This Hermeneutical Social Ethics concept assisted in my understanding the issue, how the issue is influenced by its alignment with the Bible and my response to the issue.

Additional research methods that laid the framework for this thesis-project were the understanding and application of Living Systems, Living Systems Ministry and Missions in Dr. Hall's book *The Cat & the Toaster*. Dr. Hall's approach to systems thinking exposed the identity of three types of practitioners: technician; systems actors and systems thinkers.

The Hexagoning Process served as an excellent needs assessment tool for doing ministry. The Hexagoning concept helped students, practitioners and churches fine tune their ministries by utilizing the feedback and analysis, in order to zero in on the needs of a ministry that is helping the needs of the people.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOVING FORWARD WITH THE EX-OFFENDERS

In summary, in this final chapter I am reminded of two things that Peter Senge points out within his systems thinking concept: “*Shared Vision and Team Learning*. Having a *Shared Vision* represents people corporately embracing and focusing their thoughts, views, actions and mission in the same direction for the benefit of the organization and its purpose.

Team Learning begins with dialog, where the team is thinking collectively. Team learning is dependent upon teams working together, because “teams are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations.”²²⁶

Doug and Judy Hall and Steve Daman in “*The Cat and the Toaster*” zoom in on Living System Ministry, primary and secondary cultures. We are able to understand culture through learning about primary and secondary cultures because those cultures help in building relationships. Living system ministry helps one to align oneself with what God makes compared to what man has made.

With Dr. Halls teachings we learn that in admitting and embracing our poverty we begin to discover our wealth and become able to receive the refined gold, the richness and the white clothes that Jesus is speaking about in (Rev. 3:18). In finding our poverty allows us to align ourselves with the harmony of God and His living system.

Dr. Hall shared a little bit about “Redemptive Treasures.” We look to “Redemptive Treasures” because they reveal our brokenness and leave us seeking God

²²⁶ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (United States: Doubleday Publishers, 2006), 10.

and Jesus Christ for salvation. Dr. Hall points out that: redemption is at work when we confess and repent; then Christ's forgives us, and we exchange our death for his life.²²⁷ Seeking redemption helps one get rid of their personal baggage and opens the door for God's blessings to enter your life.

The numerous degrees of brokenness and poverty that is lurking within urban communities throughout the United States, paints a very grim picture in our past and present state. The population of young African American males in prison is breathtaking. Every urban community in America is faced with this crisis. Prison life comes with its share of heartache and degrees of brokenness. With the many black men who are incarcerated, their family members are experiencing similar episodes of grief, sadness, shame and isolation.

The one thing to remember is that God expresses His love and grace through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Even in dark places of confinement like prison, Jesus Christ is always there to provide hope and change lives. We learn from teachings in the Bible that the Lord will always be with us even during our troubles and distress. The Lord said to Joshua before He sent him to cross the Jordan River, *"No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you."* (Josh 1:5, NASB)

God will show up and meet you wherever you are, at home, on the streets, in prison and in church. It does not matter what the need is; the time of day and location is insignificant to the omnipresent God Almighty. Earnest seek the Lord God Almighty and He will answer.

²²⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 129.

The church is called to minister to the many in prison and to the ex-offenders. Living System Ministry and Mission provides the spiritual climate for the gospel to reach those affected by prison incarceration. Church ministers, mentors, volunteers and practitioners are called to minister and disciple inmates and re-entry ex-offenders. The gospel of the Lord extends to all the people of His creation and to anyone who chooses to hear His words and receive Him as Christ.

In the wake of the hardships that incarceration presents to many inmates and their families internal and external need continue arises that require consideration and attention. Mentoring is critical component in the outreach prison ministry concerning inmates and their families because it keeps people connected and on track.

Goode introduces the Breaking the Chains Model, which is focused on the belief that children and youth who become exposed to powerful positive influences during early stages of their lives and are taught empowering tools can break the cycle of destruction. This can deter them from negative intergenerational deviant behaviors that most likely lead to incarceration.”²²⁸ The Breaking the Chain Model is a four-part intervention program that encompasses a *Mentoring Program*, *Sponsoring Program*, *Tutoring Program* and *Referral Program*.

“The Spirit Of The Lord Is Upon Me, Because He Anointed Me To Preach The Gospel To The Poor. He Has Sent Me To Proclaim Release To The Captives, And Recovery Of Sight To The Blind, To Set Free Those Who Are Downtrodden, To Proclaim The Favorable Year Of The Lord.”

----- Luke 4:18-19

(New American Standard Bible)

²²⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 76.

The Goals: Ex-offender Ministry

The first goal of the ex-offender ministry is to place God in the forefront of all that is done in ministering to others. The primary goal within the ex-offender ministry will focus on ministering to the ex-offenders and meeting their needs. The goal of the ministry is expected to reach far beyond the anticipated achievements of man. One goal is in preparing the ex-offender for re-entry into the community. Other goals are to minister, mentor, teach, encourage Christian spiritual renewal, reduce the incarceration and recidivism rate, create disciples of Christ and bring shalom in the urban communities.

Shalom

Dr. Eldin Villafañe through his Jeremiah Paradigm in “Seek the Peace of the City” describes how various degrees of brokenness in an urban community can be transformed into God’s *shalom* for the city through His grace and love. Dr. Villafañe, always motivated and driven by the Spirit of God, captures the inspiration within the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “And to seek the Peace [*Shalom*] of the city... and pray to the Lord for it; for in its Peace [*Shalom*] you will have Peace [*Shalom*] (29: 7).”²²⁹

Now, we have come to this place as Christian leaders and practitioners who are reticent to become good servants of the Lord. We embark on this opportunity to become stewards, disciples and leaders who continue to seek ways to employ the efforts and innovative concepts of living systems to answer the call and meet the needs of others through ministry. There has been too much loss, hurt, pain and suffering in our urban

²²⁹ Eldin Villafañe, *Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995.), 1.

communities and now is the time to begin bring a change toward how we can do better with helping ex-offenders, people, communities and cultures in need.

The Ministry Approach: God First

In all that we do in this life we must always place God and Jesus Christ in the forefront of our lives and in ministry. We are a part of God's first living system and any other living systems that we are exposed to during our lives are just an extension to the living systems that God has created. A good place to begin with any ministry is with prayer. Opening with prayer, praise and worship helps with connecting with God in the spirit. God hears our prayers when we seek Him earnestly in prayer. Prayer also presents an opportunity for us to give thanks to the Lord. The ministry session would also be concluded with prayer.

In developing an ex-offender ministry: A look at a basic structure would be a great starting point. Any ministry to be developed requires that a team of ministry practitioners and Christian leaders who have diverse skillsets that can address the diverse needs that might arise. Along with establishing a team a plan of action must also be in place from the very beginning.

Ministry calls for Christians to serve as inviting ambassadors for Christ Jesus who will minister, mentor, teach, preach and assist others with needs through Christian love and support. Ministries begin to grow when there is an inviting spiritual atmosphere that introduces hope through God's word and His love. Ministries need available servants who are willing to do the work of God where it can multiply from one Christian believer to the other. There are some suggested basic patterns below that churches can adopt to develop any ministry within the church.

1) Grow: Growing Members of the church:

In attaining spiritual renewal in the church and promoting growth, people begin to grow spiritually when they are being fed by the word and spirit of God. The word of God provided a sense of hope and direction. The factors that help to achieve spiritual renewal in the church are:

- A. *Observation:* Guiding people towards devoting their lives in establishing a committed relationship with God through prayer, worship and discipleship.
- B. *Meeting Perceived needs:* Putting forth the effort to meet the perceived needs of others and incorporating the availability of cost and resources for the ministry to operate.
- C. *Relevant Communication:* requires that there exist an expression of love and respect for one another through faith.
- D. *Develop Positive Appreciations:* by moving beyond brokenness and become transformed through continued prayer and meditation with God.
- E. *Meeting Basic Needs:* Fellowshiping with the Lord is a basic spiritual and personal need that is essential for spiritual renewal and growth.
- F. *Multiplication:* Through ministry one grows by the teachings and preaching of the word. The great reward for one's growth is to become a blessing for someone else by duplicating and multiplying what you have learned and passing it on to other to promote, nurture and cultivate their personal and spiritual growth.

2) Equip: Equipping Ministry Leaders/Practitioners:

The church, ministering to the ex-offender seeks ways of bring them to Christ and reducing the recidivism rate. People come to Christ because they are

seeking something better than where they are at the moment in their lives. The part is that people are also led to Christ through the Holy Spirit.

There are many Christian leaders and practitioners who are willing and able to engage in ministering to individuals. In order to do ministry effectively, Christian practitioners must be equipped the appropriate knowledge and training. Doing ministry requires a certain degree of knowledge, training and skillsets in order to effectively accommodate the needs of others. There is specific training that is required in ministering to ex-offenders. Equipping practitioners in ministry involves two parts: Equipping people, 1) through training and education, 2) through service, resources and skillset.

Every ministry has its own set of issues to address and a network of resources, training and education of how best to manage a re-entry or ex-offender ministry. Practitioners would need to receive information and training on the mental and emotional aspects of interacting with the ex-offender. Each of the ministry practitioners emerge from diverse professions and there is a lot that can be accomplished in developing this ministry. The objective in building any ministry is place round pegs in round holes. There are some practitioners who hold counseling psychology credentials that can assist with some of the emotional issues that a person might exhibit. There are others that are teachers by profession, and others that have a background and connection with the criminal justice system. So, as this ministry is being developed, a plan for a diverse group of team members is also being incorporated in the plans.

- A. *Observation:* There are many ex-offenders that worship and sit among us during church service. Discipling ex-offender will assist them with maintain a strong connection with God. Establishing a foundation for the ex-offender through worship, Bible study, mentoring, encouragement and prayer will help in his or her life-long connection with God.
- B. *Perceived Needs:* Christian practitioners engage in outreach beyond the walls of the church. The church must find ways to offer encouragement and mentoring to ex-offenders and their families.
- C. *Relevant Communication:* The church must communicate and formulate strategies for developing a safe environment around the church.
- D. *Positive Appreciation:* Christian leaders must be safe in their environment as they minister to ex-offenders and people in crisis. Ministry leaders can adopt a protocol to work in teams of two when ministering to people in severe crisis, gender and ethical issues.
- E. *Meeting Basic Needs:* The practitioner begins to meet the needs of the ex-offender by helping him apply Biblical teachings to his everyday encounters. Establish a strong mentoring relationship with the ex-offenders to assist them in navigating from day to day.
- F. *Multiplication:* The Christian leader should provide the ex-offender with resources, suggestions and information for continued development and growth. Encourage the ex-offender in leadership and discipleship so that he can be equipped with skills to mentor and disciple others. Discipleship involves multiplication in doing ministry.

3) Engage: Engaging Ministry Leaders into specific task within the ministry:

I plan to request the assistance other ministry leaders and trained mentors in the church to become engaged in some part of the ex-offender ministry. The pastor can request and select ministry leaders to assist me with particular aspects of the ex-offender ministry. Some of the ministries at Concord Baptist Church can overlap to a small degree. There are ministry leaders that already have a relationship with someone who has had exposure to the criminal justice system.

I previously mentioned that I would begin with ex-offenders, simple means that in developing this ex-offender ministry attention will be directed into developing this ministry, but I will minister and mentor all who the Lord sends my way. I plan to begin with the ex-offenders in the church and as the ministry develops, then I will incorporate an outreach component to the ministry. I plan to focus on one phase at a time and expand the ministry in the future.

I will seek other Christian practitioners who are engaged in prison ministry to solicit their support and guidance with the ex-offender ministry. I plan to engage in networking with other churches and pastors to conduct outreach ministry in the community. I will connect with government agencies: probationers, probation officers, prison Chaplains and re-entry programs to develop contacts and resources aid in the development of the ministry.

4) Support: Support from the church:

How do I get the church to support this ex-offender ministry?

I will get the support for the ex-offenders ministry from the church by leading by example. In the beginning phase of developing this ministry I will take the lead with

ministering to a few ex-offenders a time. I plan to introduce what I am doing in ministry and invite others to join me. God calls all Christian believers to be obedient to His word. As servants of the Lord we are obligated to participate in His ministry. All that I do and pursue, I place my partition and prayers before the Lord. I will seek my support through the Lord and He will hear my voice and answer my prayers.

Anticipated Outcomes

With anticipation I plan to pray for, encourage, minister, and guide the ex-offender with re-entry support upon being released. The anticipated outcome for this thesis-project is to develop and begin implementing this ministry within the urban church. I anticipate reaching and addressing the needs of many ex-offenders and their families. I anticipate that the ex-offender ministry will grow its own branches over time.

The anticipated outcomes will incorporate a strong prayer base, building an re-entry ministry team, mentoring and discipling ex-offenders. This ministry will seek resources and contact information for referrals to assist the ex-offender with concerns beyond the ministry's ability to address. With all of the anticipated outcomes for this ministry I pray and seek to reduce the recidivism rate through ministering to ex-offenders.

This ministry will seek ministry practitioners from diverse skills, gifts and vocations or backgrounds. This will be a welcoming ministry for all who have a desire to participate and work for the Lord.

Discipleship is one of the anticipated outcomes that I would like to emerge from this ministry is to help develop ex-offenders into disciples. As the ex-offender matures in ministry, I would hope for the ex-offender to progress into discipling others. I

recognize *Leadership Disciples* as individuals who develop a stronger role as a disciple with helping and teaching others. *Leadership Disciples* can be recycled into Mentors, which is ex-offenders who will build relationships, first with God and then with others in the church and out in the community. The discipling ex-offender can play a very important role when doing outreach ministry in the urban community with some of the troubled youth. The ex-offender has already traveled the path that many of our youth are headed. The discipling ex-offender can bring the reality of a criminal journey to light and possibly help others apply the brakes to prevent a derailment in someone's life.

Conclusion

What I have learned through the Hexagon Process is that you can approach an entirely difficult or unknown topic/circumstance and develop methods to address and find answers to a need. The Hexagon Process will help me in addressing some of the needs of the ex-offender (ministry, outside resources or support, mentoring and learning/skills). The Hexagon Process will assist me and other leaders to learn about ex-offenders, correctional institutions, other correctional professionals and services, and provide guidance. The Hexagon Process will help me focus on the positive and negative aspects of ministering to ex-offenders.

I have learned that people need *hope* and faith in order to press on to accomplish any task, dream, desire or dimension beyond themselves. Dr. Villafañe spoke about the Jeremiah Paradigm that incorporated hope, presence, peace/shalom and prayers in the city that has been crippled with brokenness, violence, poverty, crime, hopelessness and a dead spirit.

I expect the outcome to be an inviting experience for the ex-offender in coming

to Christ. The ministry will seek to provide support for some basic needs, Biblical support and Christian development. I anticipate developing a ministry that would serve as a resource to minister to and assist ex-offenders in returning back into society. I would solicit outside sources and resources that can aid in helping the ex-offender get back on his/her feet. I believe that sometimes all a person needs is a start or a helping hand to get back on track with life.

I will seek to incorporate the process of “Grand Ma’s Story”/Loop Process that has been described in the Hexagon Process so that the ministry can recycle itself as a ministry. The recycling process that I believe will become beneficial in this ministry is to first place the ministry in God’s authority through prayer. Ministers and leaders in this ministry will develop a series of Process of the Gospel steps to incorporate within the ministry: (1) Observation: prayer, discipleship and connecting with God. (2) Relevant Communication, reaching beyond the walls of the church, mentoring and utilizing some ex-offenders to mentor others. (3) Positive Regards: caring for people. (4) Meeting perceived needs – reaching out beyond the walls of the church through encouragement and opportunity. (5) Meeting basic needs through outreach and education. (6) Multiplication – using resources for development and growth.

Part of the process of ministering to all people is to provide *hope, help* and *prayer* while identifying some of the circumstances that might affect their lives. The next step would be to help one find a solution to possibly resolving an issue. Another anticipated outcome is to provide hope to ex-offenders. Hebrews 12: 2, “*Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith...*” The Bible teaches us “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word.*” “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of*

things not seen. Believing that, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” (Phil. 4: 13),* the Ex-Offender Ministry will seek to provide hope, purpose, a future and a strong relationship with God.

While the initial focus of this ministry is to develop an ex-offender ministry within the church, prayerfully, future recommendations for other extensions to the ministry will involve a more pronounced outreach ministry in the community and prison ministry component being developed as an expansion of fulfilling God’s will in meeting the needs of the people. I anticipate that this Ex-Offender Ministry will improve and develop into a growing ministry.

I leave you with a Benediction: *“ Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21, NASB).*

Recommendations For Further Study

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APPENDIX A

HEXAGONING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Hexagoning Project I – Capturing Ideas

Positive Focus Question:

What are the factors to achieve Spiritual Renewal in the Church?

1. By having the courage to express Christian Love to a brother or sister in Christ.
2. By placing God first in all you do or seek to accomplish.
3. Being able to listen to issues of others and provide methods to assist them.
4. Seeking the foundation and focus of the Church is the Word of God.
5. The Word of God is the root and the continuous goal of the Church.
6. The people must be “hearers” as well as “doers” of the Word of God.
7. The people must desire and Love God.
8. The people must strive for the relationship that is ordained by scripture. “Love the Lord God.”
9. Spiritual hunger and a commitment to seeing God.
10. 2 Chron. 7:14, The willingness to recognize our spiritual poverty and repent.
11. Openness to the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of revival and renewal.
12. Elements of the churches programs that make the greatest Spiritual impact in the community.
13. Elements that could be missions outreach; focusing on the external elements of renewal.
14. Religious or Church revivals, focusing on the internal elements of renewal.
15. Set surrendering to God’s Will as a priority.
16. Accept responsibility for success and failure.
17. With obedience to the teachings of the Bible.
18. Transformed lives more like Christ.
19. Fellowship
20. Financial, tangible and intangible resources.
21. Commitment of Church Elders and Parishioners.
22. A sound Biblical teaching and preaching Church.
23. With meaningful workshops, retreats and facilitators.
24. An uplifting and relevant worship service.
25. Everyone should share a single vision: Being on one accord.
26. Consistent Bible Study with all groups aimed at the same lessons, through varied techniques.
27. Everyone bring one: reaching out to the community; expanding the vision.
28. Ministry Leaders who are strong in their faith and respectful to all members.
29. Positive Church climate: New members feel a part of or connection to their new Church.
30. Strong Church leadership to carry out the tenants of the faith and preach God’s Word.

31. Teaching and preaching that focus on Spiritual Renewal solely from a sound Biblical base.
32. All ministries should be engaged in the effort with Biblical studies and activities that reflect the goal.
33. More time spent in reflection and prayer
34. Accepting God as our Lord and Savior.
35. By being a slave for His Kingdom Plans first.
36. Focus on God not man.

APPENDIX B:

HEXAGONING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Negative Focus Question:

What are the challenges/hindrances of empowering urban believers through Christian education in the Church?

37. The lack of support from other leaders who are able to provide assistance.
38. "Selfishness" One having a self-fulfilling agenda. They are only concerned with their own ministry and not others ministry.
39. Dysfunctional attitudes will promote challenges in empowering Urban Believers through Christian education.
40. Time other than Sunday. Time is not set aside.
41. "The cares of the world" - keeps people from making it a priority in their daily lives.
42. Programs often feel insincere when offered in the urban setting. "Appears like a gimmick."
43. Negative attitudes about the value of Christian Education.
44. Finding competent teachers within the Church to make it interesting.
45. Getting support and commitment from Church leadership.
46. Lack of available resources and lessons by participants as relevant to issues they encounter on a daily basis.
47. Conditions that lead to a lack of participation on a long-term basis.
48. The absence of Effective Christian Education, creativeness that addresses participants: "where they live."
49. Absence of commitment to intimate personal relationship with Christ.
50. No clear connection between Bible study opportunities and personal empowerment.
51. Christian Education not seen as a clear priority.
52. Unqualified Instructors
53. Lack of appropriate and consistent educational curriculum.
54. Lack of consistent attendance of pupils and instructors.
55. Lack of commitment from the Church.
56. Poor Attendance.
57. Lack of offering constructive studies, workshops that are all in the same time frame: Pitting one against the other.
58. My way is the best way attitude.
59. Planning an event during the same time as yours, "I'm more important..!"
60. Lack of coming together to brainstorm in order to achieve the same goal. Lack of unity.
61. Inconsistencies when church education is offered.
62. Lack of diversity of classes offered to people in different phases of their Christian Walk.
63. When people are expected to pay a high conference fee to receive education.

- 64. When teaching and preaching has no focus or direction for the congregation.
- 65. When fragmented ministries have their own agenda and are not linked to the "big picture" for the Church.
- 66. Not enough time spent in pursuit of God, self and prayer.
- 67. Ministries help & hurt by asking for too much time.
- 68. We have a lot of "Soap Opera" Churches.
- 69. Lack of true believers.
- 70. When believers aren't just learning rules and laws ordered by the church leader who has no interest in God's vision and plans. Must be God focus.

APENDIX C:

HEXAGONING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Hexagoning Project II Ex-offenders – Capturing Ideas

[Positive Focus Question:]

How can the Church minister to urban ex-convicts; bring them to Christ and reduce the recidivism rate?

1. Find out which ex-convicts want a second chance to be a useful part of society.
2. Create an environment suited for the ex-convict.
3. The ministers should not judge the ex-convicts on past deeds.
4. Ensure the environment exists in the Church that does not judge someone's past.
5. Have programs (Ministries) to address the issue of reconnecting with God.
6. Have programs (Ministries) that give ex-convicts a sense of purpose combined with their new "Christian Walk."
7. Proactive: Special Trained Ministers for individual and family issues.
8. Prison Ministry: Special Trained Ministers for ex-convicts on the inside needing normalization prior to being released (Reformed Christians).
9. Transitional Ministers exposed to a Church for commitment: Christian friends and family need a prayer warrior.
10. Demonstrate total acceptance.
11. Teach Forgiveness.
12. Provide financial assistance for educational and vocational training/trade.
13. Provide assistance for physical needs (shelter, food and clothing).
14. Offer job opportunities for job training and mentoring.
15. Encourage through fellowship, opportunities, mentoring and being a role model.
16. Church members must be opened minded: Remind ourselves not to sit in judgment of others.
17. Be mindful: Scriptures teaches "...for we have all sinned and fallen short of God's goodness, he who is without sin, cast the first stone.
18. Examine our personal feelings; there might be crime in our past that is triggered by ministering to others.
19. Church leaders need to be educated in aspects of law & judicial process to understand the limitations of ministering to ex-convicts.
20. Establish an on-going street ministry.
21. To be a part of a structured Church men's group/women's group.
22. Develop a ministry that addresses/assist in job placement.
23. Create different focus groups that cater to ex-convicts.
24. Have a hotline number where an ex-convict can call when they feel a relapse or bad behavior coming on.

25. Show ex-convicts that they are people; we love and care for them; not only on Sunday, but every day of the week.
26. Create a dedication program where they get involved in the community through the church.
27. Ministers publically speak at jails/prisons to provide a positive outlook for ex-cons.
28. Have a brunch/lunch where ex-con can tell their story: overcoming battles with the help of the church.
29. Establish prevention groups.
30. Outreach: Go to the jails before they get released.
31. Establish a Christian "Half way" house.
32. First lead by example. Next find them and spend time talking with them about the church.
33. Get them into Church and provide counseling.
34. Get them community work through the Church; pray with them and for them.
35. Church is willing to provide a second chance to ex-cons who seek Christ.
36. Church must provide a safe environment for other worshipers.
37. Church must provide a safe environment for ex-cons from scrutiny/harassment.
38. Church must provide resources: (Counseling, referrals, outreach) to assist ex-cons in their transition.
39. Church must provide Discipleship support to ex-cons.
40. Church must provide mentoring and ministerial support.
41. Church must be willing to listen to the concerns of the ex-con.
42. The Church and members must be honest, respectful and truthful with the ex-con.
43. Members of the Church offering assistance and support.
44. Church can assist in locating housing.
45. Church to teach basic domestic and personal skills.
46. Teach the ex-con how to pray, understand the Bible through Bible Study.
47. Teach how to live and walk in the Word of God.
48. Church to provide opportunities that deter ex-cons from recidivism.
49. Tell the ex-con who God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is.
50. Provide the ex-con with his/her own Study Bible and encourage their personal relationship with God.

APPENDIX D:

HEXAGONING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Hexagoning Project II Ex-offenders – Capturing Ideas

[Negative Focus Question:]

What are some of the circumstances that might hinder Christian Ministry Outreach to the ex-offender in the urban Church community?

51. Church Ministry Outreach hindered by those who believe their efforts would be a waste of time or money.
52. Ex-cons using the ministry efforts for illegal activity.
53. Racism – efforts that maintain stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos.
54. By lack of trust toward the ex-con.
55. A hindrance for the ex-con exists through CORI record check when seeking employment.
56. Concerns that the ex-con has not truly changed their ways from criminal activity.
57. Concerns that the ex-con is tempted to commit a crime in a wealthy church.
58. Emotionally unstable ex-cons will hinder efforts of Christian Outreach Ministry.
59. Church cannot allow the ex-con to work in certain ministries bases on their past criminal history (sexual offender).
60. Church not being proactive with known family crisis and no resources to help with family issues.
61. No Prayer: no groups to keep in touch with ex-cons and their problems.
62. Not being friendly.
63. Treating the individual (s) as an outcast.
64. Being an unwelcoming community.
65. Not addressing the Spiritual and Emotional needs of the ex-con.
66. Inadequate resources to provide meaningful assistance.
67. An unwelcoming congregation with intolerance & lack of knowledge of God's Word.
68. Insufficient volunteers to provide mentoring.
69. Ex-cons lack faith and trust in the church.
70. The Church not having a positive image when reaching outside of its four walls.
71. Ex-cons who are known to the community and the church cause alarm for victims and residents who worship at the same church.
72. Lack of available funding in the church.
73. Fear of ex-convicts.
74. Lack of commitment and resources.
75. Not identifying with the ex-convicts struggle.
76. Being judged in a negative light by the church community.
77. Fear of not being accepted in the church.

78. Lack of support from the church; feeling no relation or connection.
79. Thinking or feeling embarrassed.
80. Propaganda/negative stereotypes associated with convicts.
81. Feeling that God could never forgive for sinful things that they have done.
82. Being belittled by negative company/crowd they keep.
83. Low self-esteem or shame.
84. Lack of religious knowledge.
85. Fear of negative judgment from the church.
86. People inside/outside of the church are judgmental.
87. People not leading by example.
88. Negative attitudes projected from church goers.
89. Not being given a second chance to do what is right.
90. Bias attitudes will hinder a Christian Ministry and the ex-cons Spiritual growth.
91. Lack of opportunity will hinder growth.
92. The seriousness of the ex-cons past offences can hinder Christian Outreach.
93. The ex-cons continued involvement with criminal activity.
94. Lack of education can hinder ex-cons future endeavors.
95. The lack of courage to engage in the ministry of the church.
96. The inability to adjust to the outside world due to long-term incarceration.
97. The lack of will.
98. Frustrations in life.
99. Lack of support.
- 100 Continued Substance Abuse.
- 101 Lack of employment.
- 102 The absence of Christian involvement and love.
- 103 Lack of faith.
- 104 Lack of money
- 105 Unwilling to sacrifice his/her life to the Lord.
- 106 Refuse to establish a relationship with God.

APPENDIX E:

HEXAGON PROJECT INSTRUCTION SHEET & QUESTIONER

Hexagon Project I

I have selected the following individuals to participate in a “Ministry Systems Thinking Project”. It is required that I facilitate a workshop class for my first residency project in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. I am seeking your assistance for this project. Participants, it would be helpful to me if you could please provide your responses ASAP, prayerfully by Feb. 24, 2011.

System Thinking – System Thinking is described as “a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools to make the full patterns/variables clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively” (Senge, p. 7).

Within the concept of “system thinking” there are many external variables that later show a relationship or connection to the whole picture. In this system thinking concept we see that God, Church, Ministries and Christian human endeavors are also systems. There are many things that we do separately in ministry, but through the bigger picture in ministry everything is connected when their ideas and efforts come together as the whole.

Hexagon Concept (Hexagoning)– Involves an “idea processing activity.” The idea processing activity requires that you incorporate several variables to develop or enhance systemic thinking. The variables will assist in capturing ideas, arranging ideas, creating ideas, evaluating ideas, connect ideas and implement ideas. This concept can be utilized in many thinking environments. Today we will begin to introduce this concept in the ministry environment. Hexagoning is the method that is utilized to analyze and evaluate an issue. In this context a ministry issue will be considered. System thinking determines how we explore and develop strategies to address complex systems.

Furthermore, there is a need to take a closer look at church ministries and how the individual(s) and the church can improve in their service to God and promote Spiritual Renewal in the church.

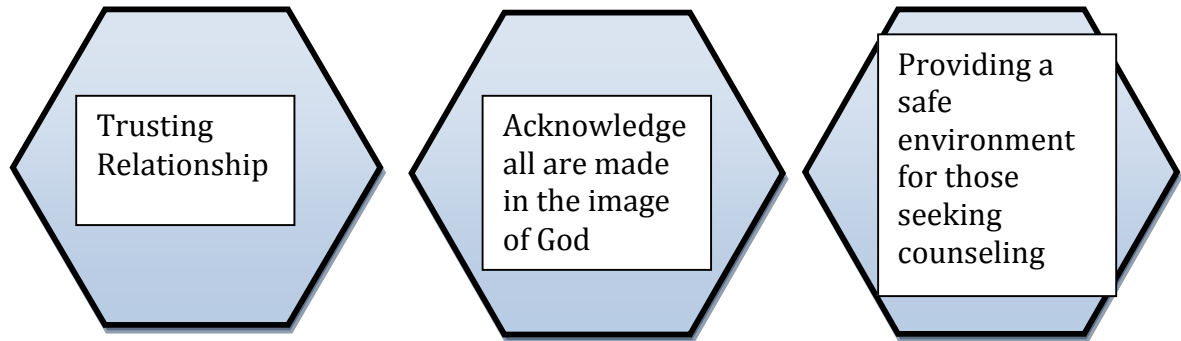
Participants: are required to present ideas that are relevant to a specific “focus question. Participants will then write in a few words after thinking/brainstorming (a “headline” phrase) that represent each idea on a single hexagon. The participants in this project will be provided with two questions to respond to. There will be one positive question and one negative question. Each question presented will require three “headline phrases” to aid in the Hexagoning process. Please view the following examples of what is required of participants. If during the evaluation process where one participant’s response is the same as other participants, you will be asked to make an alternative selection.

(Please See Examples 1 and 2 on the next page)

Example 1:

(Positive) Focus Question # 1: How can a church community become a safe environment?

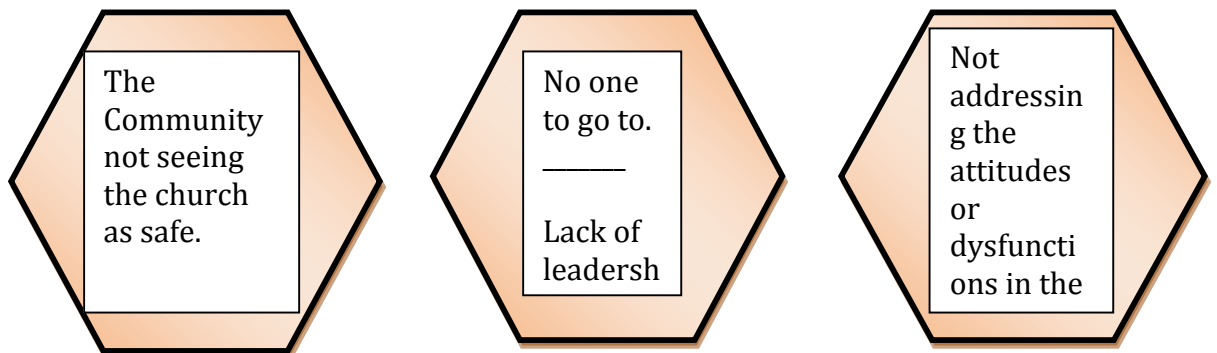
Headline Phrase/Response as follows:



Example 2:

(Negative) Focus Question # 2: What hinders creating a safe environment? What could go wrong? How could it be counterproductive?

Headline Phrase/Response as follows:



The above examples show the type of responses are required to assist in this “Hexagon - System Thinking Process.

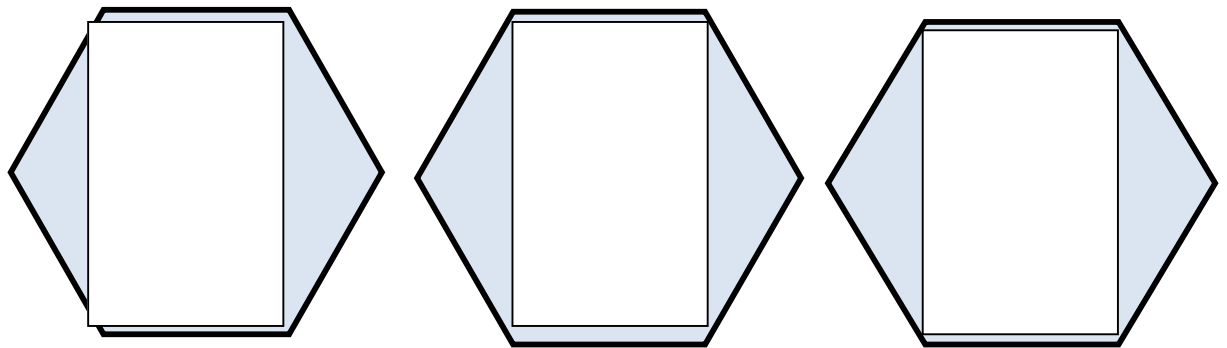
Note: Please see page three and review the focus questions # 1 (Positive response) and focus question # 2 (Negative/Hindrances Response). Then record your three responses in the appropriate area within the Hexagons that are provided.

Please provide your responses to the focus questions on this page. Your participation in this project is very much appreciated.

Example 1:

(Positive) Focus Question # 1: *What are the factors to achieve Spiritual Renewal in the Church?*

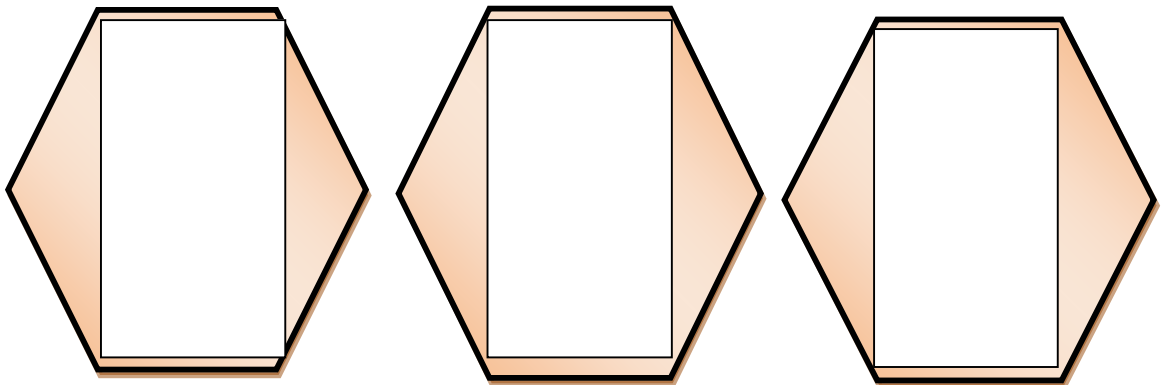
Headline Phrase/Response as follows:



Example 2:

(Negative) Focus Question # 2: *What are the challenges/hindrances of empowering urban believers through Christian education in the Church?*

Headline Phrase/Response as follows:

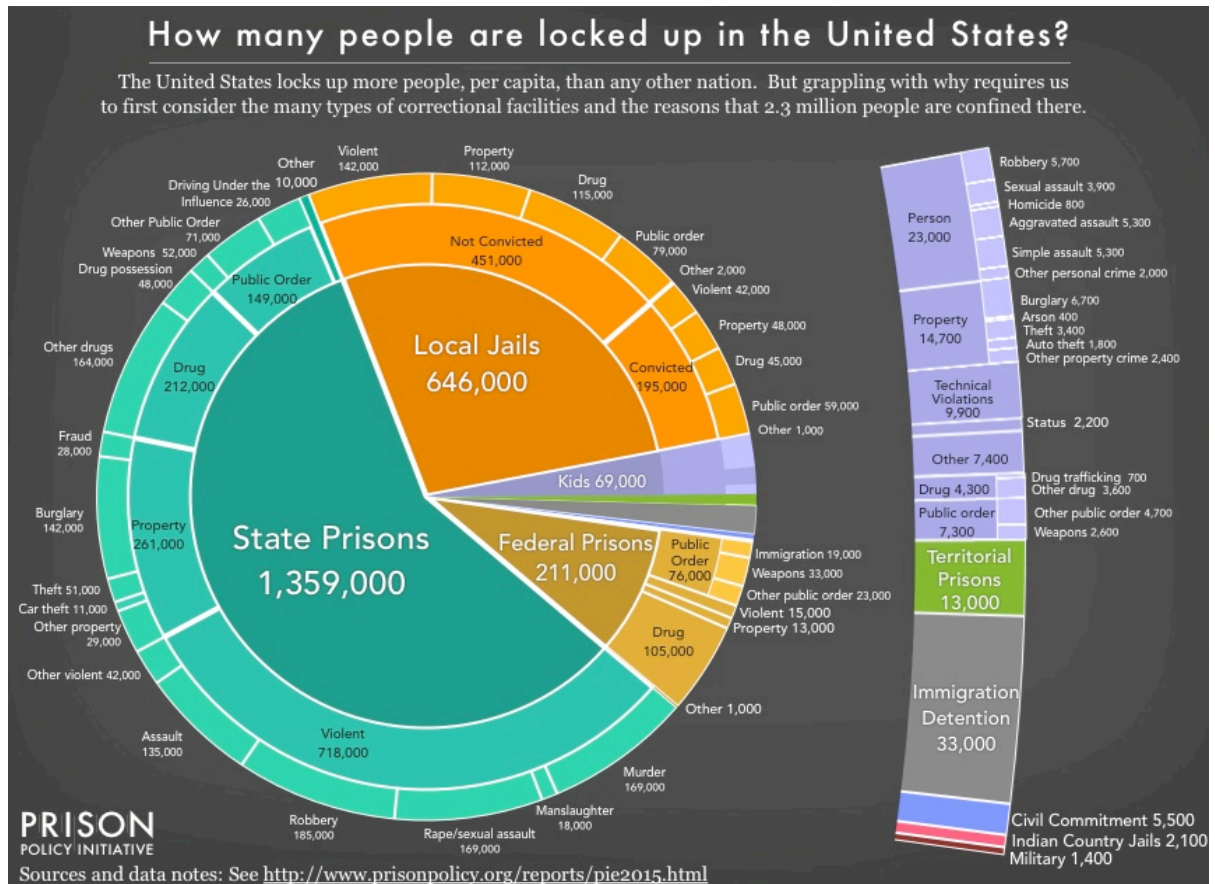


I thank all the participants for their participation in this Hexagon/System Thinking Project. God Bless all of you...
Sincerely, Min. Keith Turner

APPENDIX F:

MASS INCARCERATION: THE WHOLE PIE 2015

The following pie chart provides a clearer view and a breakdown of the incarceration crisis in Massachusetts, reported in 2015.



See the “big picture” of incarceration in America. “The United States has 1.4 million or more than 2 million people in prison.”²³⁰

²³⁰ Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy. *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2015*, <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2015.html?gclid=CKqRmOD2qssCFYQfhgodbb8CLw> (Accessed Mar. 5, 2016). 1.

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VITA

The author of this work is Keith A. Turner, born July 15, 1960 in Boston, Massachusetts. Keith A. Turner for the past thirty-seven years has worked in Law Enforcement to the current date. He is one of many first responders at the Marathon Bombings in 2013. He holds several degrees in a wide range of studies: Management of Legal Institutions (University of Massachusetts-Boston, B.A.), Management-Integrated Studies (Cambridge College, M. ed.), Masters Criminal Justice (Curry College – Two time National Deans List Recipient), and Masters of Arts in Urban Ministry (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary).

Keith A. Turner was called to the ministry in 2004 and has served in the ministry of Jesus Christ at Concord Baptist Church of Boston in Milton, MA. and currently affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts.

In 2002 he began the pursuit of a seminary education at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary CUME and in 2007 he completed his degree earning a Masters of Arts in Urban Ministry. In 2011 he attended the Doctor of Ministry Residencies for the Urban Ministry Track at Gordon-Conwell Theological, Boston/ CUME. This project is presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has completed his studies and is expected to graduate in May 2017.

Keith A. Turner currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts. He intends to implement an ex-offender/re-entry ministry at the Concord Baptist Church of Boston in Milton, Massachusetts.